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Roseanna McCoy 1947

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ROSEANNA McCOY

ALBERTA HANNUM

Roseanna McCoy

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for
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A L B E R T A H A N N U M

First printing

P R I N T E D I N T H E U N I T E D S T A T E S O F A M E R I C A

for
KAY *and* SALLY

FOREWORD

Roseanna McCoy concerns an incident in the Hatfield-McCoy feud. The feud itself is a distinct piece of the American scene. But the incident is universal. Helen of Troy launched a thousand ships because of Paris. Roseanna McCoy brought to fire a smoldering war that lasted fifty years because she wanted to be happy with someone she loved. Juliet spent life itself to know that for a while. It is an old, old story, but this time it happened in America. It happened in the 1880's, on the wild borderland between Kentucky and West Virginia. Macaulay's description of the Scotch highlanders might well have described their descendants in those intensifying lost hills and hollows of our own country two centuries later:

"Their courage was what great exploits in all the four quarters of the globe have since proved it to be. Their intense attachment to their own tribe and to their patriarch, though politically a great evil, partook of the nature of a virtue. The sentiment was misdirected and ill regulated; but still it was heroic. . . . It was true that the highlander had few scruples about shedding the blood of an enemy; but it is not less true that he had high notions of the duty of observing faith to allies and hospitality to guests. . . . His inordinate pride of birth and his contempt for labor and trade were indeed great weaknesses and have done more than the sterility of the soil to keep his country poor and rude. Yet even here there was some compensation. It must in fairness be acknowledged that the patrician virtues were not less widely diffused among the popu-

lation of the highlands than the patrician vices. As there was no other part of the island where men, sordidly clothed, lodged and fed, indulged themselves to such a degree in the idle, sauntering habits of an aristocracy, so there was no other part of the island where such men had in such degree the better qualities of the aristocracy—grace and dignity of manner, self-respect, and the noble sensibility which makes dishonor more terrible than death.”

Such was the actual background for Roseanna McCoy and Jonse Hatfield. But their story transcends time and place; hence the liberties taken with those elements in this account.

ROSEANNA McCOY

W E'RE just two people." The words, brushing past in her mind, scarcely touching the thought of their having been said in parting—she did not want to think of that yet—brushed her whole body slightly up, with sensation.

She stood very still. By the spring beside her the bucket was empty. She should be filling it and getting back. But she could not, just yet. She only wanted to stay here and keep for a little while the sight of him in her mind; his voice—the need that penetrated into everything. She supposed that was wrong, the way her world accounted right and wrong, yet there was such happiness in that penetration, she could not think about right and wrong.

Something had happened that changed the world. Perhaps she had known it would happen someday, not knowing it with her mind but as though all her life had built toward it. And now that it was here, the eagerness of mind, the lifting ache of her body, was not exactly a conscious thing. No thing alone was making her glad. It was the whole of it, as though she had taken a fire to her heart.

And it could not be, in any reasoning at all it could not be. But she could not reason. She could not think. She could only feel.

She sat down on a rock at the side of the spring, and found herself smiling a little, at odd, incidental remem-

branches of him; the imperative way he had used wrong things, like knocking his pipe out against the water bucket, the way he had seemed too big for the small mill room—he had taken the room over when he came into it.

“Roseanna McCoy!”

She turned, startled at her thinking of him being so broken into. Her brother was pushing his way up through the laurel to the road beside her. Usually Little Randall made her want to laugh, just to look at him. He was such a raw young thing of a boy, just thirteen, his hair wild and his legs skinny; his jeans forever too short. The last pair she had made him she had told him she was going to put a rock on his head to keep him from growing. But there was something about him that always got her around the heart, too; his shyness, and yet times almost a violent warmth of nature, his fierce young loyalties—

She suddenly stiffened, with fear. “How did you know I was here?”

“I saw you start after water,” he told her matter-of-factly. “But la, you were gone so long I thought you’d gone to Jordan for it.”

Roseanna laughed then, the released laughter of some crisis passed, and tousled his hair; the hands slowing and dropping. The boy looked up at her curiously. The white sunbonnet had fallen back to her shoulders, and three wild asters broke the simplicity of her red brown hair. He began to stare at her, as though he were just then seeing her; the proud straight brows, the slender cut of the face, yet the freshness of it, like something quiet of the outdoors—with some strangeness in it now he could not call.

He shifted uneasily. It was the quick merry life of her

that the boy knew. But she had grown almost pensive. He turned to see what it was she was looking at, with her gray eyes so soberly alight. But it was only the cloud shadows moving fast and clean and in great sweeps across the mountains.

"A rare pretty day, Little Randall," she said slowly. "So fast to change, and yet so sure."

"You're the craziest girl in Kentucky!"

"It has feelin' to it, bein' crazy has." A high flowing feeling.

"This mornin'," Little Randall was studying her, "you were sky high, just thinkin' about comin'. But when you get here you turn up in a lonesome place all by yourself."

Not by myself, Little Randall, and not lonesome. She corrected him silently.

... "Don't mix in with the Hatfields, Roseanna!" Those had been her father's last words to her that morning before she had left home. "There's no good in 'em!"

"I won't," she had given him her promise quickly. Why should she want to mix in with the Hatfields when her father's face, at the unwarned calling of the very name, would darken with swift hatred. . . .

But she would have had to mix in with Jonse Hatfield, from the first moment she saw him.

At her ways grown strange to him, her brother got cross. "What's got the matter with you, anyway? What ails you that you sit, when back in the town they're dancin'?"

Roseanna did not answer. There began a lifting upward of her breasts with the burning thought of him. It was a fire if she ever lost now she thought would take the light out of the world, the warmth. She supposed people could

get along without fire, but looking ahead she could not see how. Although she could not look ahead far, because she was happy.

This whole holiday for her had had that impromptu beginning that starts a thing off lightheartedly. That she had been allowed to come at all was still an astonishment. Her father had a care about what gatherings he let her tend. Usually it was the husking bees, or quilting parties, or infairs at the houses of their own people; never the public places, like the dances in Stringtown.

This today was a political rally, for the re-election of Governor Knott. Governor Knott was a personal friend of her father's, and Old Randall was rounding up the Pike County vote for the fall election. Also toward that 1880 election, he was interested in seeing that his cousin Perry Kline stay in office as prosecuting attorney. Old Randall McCoy, as head of a clan which fingered out through that whole northeastern part of the Kentucky mountains, was getting to be a power in politics. But it was to be a day of merrymaking as well, and a few days before, listening to the plans in which she was not being included, Roseanna had proclaimed to Little Randall,

"There comes a time in every girl's life when all is blank, when you think, 'What is there to go on for?'"

Little Randall had taken it as a joke, but she had half meant it. But unpredictable world—no sooner did she complain about it, than it reversed itself, by an unexpected turn of household discipline.

The day before Little Randall had spent out in the woods with their older brother Phamer, doing some early hunting. Just he and Phamer had gone and the youngster had

come home so lofty about it he was poisonous. After a man's day in the woods it naturally was to be expected that the chores of carrying wood and water would be a letdown, but he had bickered about them all evening. Furthermore he had come home with ideas about a hunting dog of his own.

In the early cold of the rally morning he had wandered into the front of the house and noticed critically that the fire had not been built.

"I'll go get some logs, if you'll help me," Roseanna had offered.

"If you look close," he had suggested, "you'll see I'm not dressed yet."

His father had come into the room in time to hear him and commented sarcastically,

"You're sure goin' about gettin' a dog in the right way, plaguin' and devilin' and carryin' on about a little bit of work." By breakfast time he had become thoroughly exasperated.

"Randall, it's been a long time since I've whipped you. But I'm ready to!" There was a note in his voice that had stopped even Roseanna, who was standing by the table with a hickory wand brushing away flies, with a wince of pity for the youngster.

But just then Phamer had come by, and called Little Randall outside. He had brought a pup! They all heard the boy with it before they saw him, heard that high throaty laugh of his that meant something. And then he had come in, his arms full of dog, and his heart in his eyes. The great man at the head of the table had given a slumped, licked motion. And promptly banged his fist on the table.

"Then Roseanna's got to get somethin' too, for doin' that no account youngun's work for him! Roseanna, how'd you like to go to the rally today?"

At his words, contradicting all the times she'd thought he'd keep her in irons if he could, Roseanna had opened her mouth, and closed it, and said, "Oh!" And a moment later, "Oh!" And that was all she could say, over and over. Until her father had pushed back his chair with a scrape.

"Oh, for God's sake!"

The pup, with enough life for ten pups, when Little Randall had put him down experimentally, had begun racing around the room. He had taken quickly to what he liked in it, a rag rug, that was just his size, in front of the door; circling it a couple of times, then flattening out on it and refusing to budge so that Little Randall had had to drag him forcibly from the rug, on all stubborn fours. Old Randall, stopping to watch, had growled,

"My word's not worth a damn in this house."

Which everybody knew wasn't so.

Roseanna had been dazed, excited, thrilled and alive, suddenly, to the possibilities of the day. She had great plans for her hair. She whipped it through a washing, and while she was drying it in the yard, gave a bow to an imaginary partner, took right hands across and whirled herself around, humming the tune to it.

Little Randall, coming around the corner of the house just then, his arms full of wriggling speckled pup, stopped and watched. At her dancing all by herself, in the middle of the morning, there came a look of amusement to his eyes, puzzle; and an odd protectiveness.

"You just watch you don't take no left hands across today," he told her.

Roseanna took him gaily for a partner, doing a back-to-back around him. "What's that got to do with it?"

"Didn't you hear about the feller who'd pretend to make up to an enemy, offer his left hand in friendship—then plug him through the bowels with a gun in his right? Splatter entrails as far as you could throw a hat. Just bleed like the devil," he added jauntily.

Roseanna came around in front of him and stopped mildly. "Don't believe that's quite the language little boys with raisin' are usin' this year. Besides, he won't be there."

"'Course not," scoffed Little Randall. "He's dead. He met another left-handed feller."

Roseanna refused to be worried. "That happened clear out of the country, someplace in another part of the state. And he wasn't a Hatfield anyway."

"Same thing," he insisted, of the duplicity.

She grew suddenly impatient with this gloomy persistence. "What would the Hatfields be doin', comin' across the river from West Virginia to a Kentucky election rally?"

"I don't know," he said doggedly. "But I wouldn't put it past 'em. And if one comes, a whole passel of 'em 'll come. They stick so close you got to get a crowbar if you want to pry 'em loose."

"Well let 'em come, and let 'em stick." Roseanna gave a toss of her head. "So will McCoys be there—a whole county of 'em."

Her father had sent out word for every McCoy of the name, or if it had been his mother's name, or if he were friend to McCoy, to be there. And they would be there.

"Whatever else about the Hatfields, they're not that

foolish, to come over into our own territory when the whole clan's gathered."

In this Little Randall concurred scornfully. "They ain't foolish at all. They're just slime bellied snakes, they're stinkin' polecats, they're scum. They're mean, dirty—"

"All right, all right!" she cut him short, exasperated. "And I'm not studyin' on crossin' left hands with 'em. I'm just goin' to this rally to have a joyful time! So hush up, will you, afore pa hears you and changes his mind about lettin' me go?" While she was at it, she told him another thing. "And I don't want any dear sweet little brother steppin' on my heels tellin' me how to do. Little brothers," she added, "should be not seen and not heard. Little brothers," warming up to it, "days like this ought to be locked up at home!"

Little Randall grinned, and flopped down to the grass with his pup, drawing his chin back out of the way of its eager nuzzling. "Quit that now," he told it.

Still half annoyed at her high mood being broken into, Roseanna eyed the boy and his dog. "You're goin' to spoil that pup till it won't be worth a thing as a huntin' dog."

"You're agoin' to be the best little old huntin' dog in Kentucky," contradicted the boy, confidently, to the pup. "And don't let nobody tell you different. If they did," he added, "you likely bite 'em."

Roseanna laughed. "Likely it would," she agreed. They were a good deal alike, these two. And at his quick defense she dropped down beside him affectionately, at the edge of a shadow the white pine a few feet away was casting long in the morning. A change was in this day. It was in the way sun and shadow fell. Fall was coming. Although she had never taken note of its coming just this way before. There

was a sharp cold clarity to the shade, a cut of brilliance to the sun just outside it. Then, aware of the shade in another way, she lifted her hands experimentally to her hair, done up in tight paper curlers all over her head, and finding it still damp, moved.

"You got more activity than a centipede," complained Little Randall.

"Light goes to light," she told him airily, sitting down in the sun, and he grinned again.

They sat companionably, Roseanna with her long bare legs under her everyday linsey skirt stretched out comfortably straight in front of her. She leaned back on her palms, feeling the sun getting to her hair, and watched as her brother put the puppy down. It stood uncertainly a moment at this move, and then sat down, with a crazy kind of nonchalance, both back legs thrown off to one side, facing the boy, and looking up at him, its eyes black and alert.

"Most comical little old thing I ever saw!" Roseanna laughed at it, involuntarily.

Little Randall looked back at the small creature, and loved silently. "You want to play?" he asked, indifferently, and threw a stick, not too far. "Looky there, Roseanna," excited, as the puppy raced for the stick, "I never l'arnt him that till just a bit ago. You're quick," he told the puppy as it came trotting back with the stick, dropped it, growled and attacked the grubby hand reaching to pat him. At its fierceness the boy chuckled, and Roseanna shook her head, in amusement at both of them.

"Even when he's good he growls!" she said.

The boy threw the stick again, and Roseanna let herself on back in the grass, cradling her head in her arms. A

breeze lifted, bringing the earth smells up full; that full sweetness of all the last of the clovers, of all the flowering things. As she lay on her back, the high wild grass was like silver lace against the August sky. But with Little Randall's pup thrashing and panting past, losing herself in nature grew a little difficult. She sat up, giving up the idea. But the puppy, suddenly tired of its game, unexpectedly took a flying leap into his master's lap, and promptly flattened out, exhausted.

"Don't know why, but he seems to take to you," smiled Roseanna.

The boy roughed the drowsy little head with his grubby hand, but carefully; awkward in this new care. Then slowly, shyly, in the importance of it, "Roseanna, this is the first dog I've ever had, of my very own. I never had a dog that was just mine afore."

"That's what I know, honey," Roseanna agreed gently. "And I'm proud you got one."

"I liked old Lead, all right," he went on soberly. "But he wasn't just my dog."

The boy gave a hug to the warm, lax little thing in his lap and Roseanna got a sudden clutch of fear, remembering how badly he had felt when Lead got killed in a bear fight last winter. Lead had been the first dog Little Randall could remember. The boy had grown up that night, when his father had come home and told it: if he cried, no one knew. Nor had he since had much to do with the rest of the pack of dogs his father kept; nor any dog at all, until this morning, when he'd come in with this friendly, wriggling one. Nothing *could* happen to this one—it just couldn't! Little Randall couldn't bear it, when he'd loved it

so, and so promptly. Impulsively she moved over, and reached an arm around the narrow young shoulders.

"He's sure your dog, Little Randall."

The boy got a look of quiet content in his eyes; complete.

A long shadow grew across them, and they turned, to their father coming toward them. He was wearing his coon-skin cap and carrying his rifle, invariable signs of his preparing to leave his own property. Roseanna felt a glow of pride, as she always did, at sight of him, looking so handsome and so what he was, the powerful leader of a mighty clan. Dark and proud, Old Randall McCoy was an imposing man physically. And he carried himself with that assurance of being well thought of so that what he said to do, was done; and that among men who gave their allegiance to no one unless they chose. A fearless man, with the hard-boned strength of his face come down from the border chieftains who had been the first of his people to fight their way into that high Kentucky wilderness in search of the freedom it was in them to need. It had been a religious and political freedom those early frontiersmen had sought. Now, in the generations who had increased since then, it had grown to be a wild, raw freedom, intensifying itself in elemental passions that were unchecked, save by the strong will of the clan leader. When he chose, Old Randall McCoy could spread forth his hand and crash down his will over that whole ungoverned part of the state.

But he had the name of being a fair man, along with being hard. And he was a shrewd man. He planned well, so that there were vast tracts of that Kentucky wilderness with its forests reaching black against the sky, belonging

to the name of Randall McCoy and his sons. And his judgment was respected as well in matters that forwarded the whole clan. Old Randall McCoy was a considered man.

If he had one fault, it was his very love of planning. There was something in him that made him have to direct even the smallest affairs of his home folks, and when they went along with him, he would do anything for them. But when he was crossed, he grew cold, to the look and the touch, with a chill that went to the marrow. Nor did these frozen silences mean he had given way. Underneath that silence his own will was turning narrowly, taking new direction—and so surely it made one have an eerie wonder. Somehow, it always was managed that the matter, in the end, came his way. This was something of his indomitable will that they knew among themselves.

A kindly man, until angered, and then he was terrible. Roseanna had seen his wrath kindled in all its might only once. But she had not forgotten. It had not been toward his home folks, but it had got them. It had been a different Randall McCoy that night, bringing her a new knowledge of her father.

But now as he came on across the grass, his stern face softened at sight of two of his children sitting so companionably together in the sun. Although, as he paused beside them, his regard of his oldest daughter grew pointedly quizzical.

"Nothin' on your mind but your hair," he commented. What are you doin' to wreck it now? he wondered. She had put it up so tightly in curlers she had a slightly skinned look.

At his disgust, a quick, cool amusement ran in her gray eyes.

"Say good-by to your straight-haired daughter," she told him easily.

"This is gettin' to be a wonderful country," he said sardonically. "The women all have curly hair. It's a wonder to me, when women folks are supposed to be as busy as they are, how they'll take as much time as they do to tear themselves down."

Roseanna chuckled. "If I'd had more time, I'd of tried that concoction I read about in *Harper's Weekly*. You take half ammonia and half peroxide—"

"Mix and drink?" suggested her father.

This time Roseanna laughed out loud. It was a joyous rush of it out of lightness of heart, that rippled and sang and swept everything with it. Even Old Randall smiled, at its infectiousness, although he said dryly,

"You'll burn yourself out afore you ever get to the doin's."

Suddenly he sterned. "Remember, Roseanna, I'm lettin' you go today because you're old enough to do about as you please—so long as you use good sense." His look on her leveled. "And when you don't," there came that metallic rasp to his tone that meant what it said, and his eyes, that had been lying back quietly in good humor, seemed to come forward in his head, sharpening to glittering pieces of flint as he finished, "I'll *tell* you what to do."

There was no doubting that, nor questioning it. Roseanna sat looking back at him, silent.

The tall clan leader made a quick restive movement. "You can go with Tolbert and Little Randall. I'll not be there. I'm meetin' Jim at Blake's, to bring home that herd we bought."

They both stared at him, incredulous.

"I don't want trouble," he said shortly. "And if I saw Anderson Hatfield, there'd be trouble."

At the very mention of the name of the man who ruled as despotically across the river in West Virginia, as Old Randall ruled on this side in Kentucky, a change came over him. It had been a long war between the house of Hatfield and the house of McCoy, which had begun with what no one knew exactly, but which kindled at any provocation for anger between them, small or great. Old Randall McCoy sprang of people of whom it was said their fear of God was so great there was no room in them for fear of mortal man. But the leader of the McCoy clan hated Anderson Hatfield with a hatred deeper than his hatred of sin.

Even talking about him Old Randall's neck got red, with the veins in it swelling ugly and purple. A white line came around his thin mouth, and his voice harshened with his quivering anger.

"Don't mix in with the Hatfields, Roseanna." Almost his whole hard willed body was quivering in his effort at restraint, like some powerful intelligent animal using all its force to hold back. "There's no good in 'em!"

"Oh I won't!" Roseanna gave him her promise earnestly.

She was looking at her father very soberly now. After a long moment he turned away. He went to the barn for his horse, to ride in the opposite direction from a meeting with his enemy.

Roseanna had never seen Devil Anse Hatfield, nor any Hatfield that she knew of. But she thought it must be a name to be despised in the whole world, if it could go so sore against a man who was as strongly level-headed in every other way as she knew her father to be. He could

control his own household, he could control a great clan, he could gather up in his hand the vote of a whole wild county for his state. But he could not trust himself to meet Anderson Hatfield today. The control was a thin veneer that cracked easily to raw, angry soreness. All the time, continually before him, like some torture in him, was this hatred.

Seeing that now, Roseanna felt a sadness at the change that had come over her father in these last few moments—a man being betrayed by an obsession. It was a sad and dreadful thing to see greatness spoiled by a small thing, small like a cancer spreading and burning inside greatness; eating it, destroying it. And her father was great, in good ways that she knew, and a man to be considered politically, with his power just beginning. For all his sixty years, Randall McCoy was a young man, in his vigor of mind and body.

At the change in their father during the last minutes Little Randall, too, had become silent, but because fear had fallen on him. Now he said,

“I told you!” He pulled out a knife from his pocket and unsheathed it carefully, not to waken his dog. It was a hunting knife his father had made for him, and Little Randall thought it was the sharpest blade in all Kentucky. He picked up a play stick now, to whittle, but when he went to cut, he slashed.

Roseanna looked on troubled, not seeing him, thinking still of her father.

“It gives me a sorry feelin’, Little Randall, to see him get that way.”

Little Randall snorted. “How else would he get, after Devil Anse killed his brother!”

"But that was way back in the Civil War—when Anse was a Confederate and Uncle Harm a Union Jack."

The boy threw her a scornful glance. "You mean that was the excuse Anse used. He waylaid Harm on a lonesome path and shot him. That's the way Hatfields do. Don't none of them polecats stand on their legs and fight like a man. I wouldn't trust 'em as far as I could see 'em!"

The killing had happened before Roseanna could remember and before Little Randall had been born. The years since had continued without actual war, but there had been warring between the two houses in subtle ways.

"I wish these hard feelin's were over with."

"Only way they'll ever be over with," Little Randall was hewing the play stick to pieces, "is to clean the Hatfields out. That's what he oughta done that night at Racoon Hollow."

That was the night Roseanna remembered. Old Randall had almost killed a man that night. It was two years ago, when Old Randall had charged a Hatfield with stealing a McCoy hog. Both houses owned thousands of acres of those forested mountains, with hundreds of wild hogs in them. But the trial called to settle this claim over one razor-back had been more like two armies setting themselves in array, preparing for slaughter if necessary. Old Randall, dark faced and grim, had gone armed as heavily as his horse would take him, he and fifty McCoy's with him, following hard after him, to see that justice was done. At Racoon Hollow they had met Devil Anse, who like Old Randall kept to his horse, as though ordering the battle, with Hatfields by him, on his right hand and on his left. And when the verdict had gone to the Hatfields, by reason of one too many friends to Anse on the jury, according to McCoy's,

Old Randall might as well have had his honor rended from him and handed to his enemy, as that wild hog. The McCoys have long memories. And at that, Old Randall's bitterness that had been turning with the years since his brother's death had executed itself in a blind lunge to choke the man who had given testimony against him. But his sons by main force had held him back, to bide his time. That was not the time. That affair had been settled by law, albeit Hatfield-influenced law.

All this Roseanna had heard in the roaring hatred of that black night when the McCoys, mighty men in their rage who had pounded down out of the hills like some dark and terrible host of old—had ridden back defeated by a thing called law. At his word, and his power, thus threatened by his enemies, there had been awfulness in the fierce wrath of Old Randall. The very mountain seemed to shake and thunder with his vows of vengeance. He had been like a god of wrath, like an avenging god.

Roseanna was not made for hatred. And the lust for revenge in that night, with its threat of terrors unequaled even in that wild country, had put a dumbness, a leadenness inside her. Yet it was as though she were standing apart, looking on, and being made sick about it. The real eye was toward what lay behind it all. She had felt she was groping in the dark that night, for some small thing she could offer the stricken and alarmed eyes of her mother, and her brother Phamer's wife. Her mother had the holding of human life lightly in her people's beginnings. But that made it no easier when the time came that her own were threatened. She had said numbly,

"I'm glad it didn't come to killin', Randall. If you'd killed one of theirs, they'd a killed one of ours."

Old Randall had not answered her a word in acknowledgment. But heavily proud, moody, he had taken recourse to the stone forge he had built for himself out back of the house. Most mountain men were self-reliant; their own millers, their own distillers, their own shoemakers, and blacksmiths. But for Old Randall McCoy the forge was someplace he went to when the world got too much for him. In his lighter moments he said, of the iron he hammered on the anvil and molded to shape and form, that it was the one thing he could figure out and that would stay that way. And when he was in that mood, Roseanna and all the children took delight in the deep glow of the fire, in the great leather bellows. They watched fascinated as he turned the bright iron on the anvil, with the sparks flying as he beat it to shape.

There had been no lightness of mood as he had shut himself up in the forge after his Racoon Hollow defeat. That day he had heated the iron to blood red, striking his blows hard; steady, calculating—standing back at arm's length from the anvil to let his hammer fall with all his force.

When he had come from the forge a sure light was in his eye, hard and clear; very clear. This time what he had hammered out was an iron will, that was training itself to wait. He would wait for a time to bring the Hatfields under heel, to crush them. And he would lay the way in law. Thereafter he had turned his attention to politics, with a single, cold purpose guiding it. If the Hatfields set such store by law, then by God, law there would be, with the legal interpreting from here on out done with an eye to McCoy. He laid his plans; put in his groundwork thoroughly, patiently. And they were far-flung; no modest

using of just what was within small reach for Randall McCoy. His plans reached to the state capitol. Through his cousin Perry Kline as county prosecutor, the governor himself had come to count on this backwoodsman from the mountains as a man worth knowing. Old Randall controlled the Pike vote, and a gubernatorial election was coming up. If the Hatfields made trouble again, the McCoy's would be ready for them. Randall laid his plans like iron in rock.

Thus he had pushed his passions under, to new direction, and once again with his own he was a reasonable man, a generous man, a smart man. He knew when to put a light hand on his planning. He was putting the aspect of a holiday for his people, to the election rally today.

There was just that one weakness in him—the way the very enemies' name, or even news of them, was an arrow sharp in his vitals, shivering his very frame, shattering his ordinary reasoning with despising.

His two children on the grass had fallen silent. For Roseanna, the shadow that her father had cast as he had come toward them, seemed to have brought back that whole dark night. Until they saw him ride out from the barn, and out of the house yard, taking the opposite direction from the road to town; taking the road away from trouble. And with that, the remembrance of the dark night, its threat, seemed something from a nightmare.

Roseanna looked up. One sailing pink cloud was in all the blue sky. That was real. And the hills against it. Hills lie softly against a summer sky. There was an ease to the white pine in the morning winds, and brightness of color everywhere—summer color with fall just beginning in the saffron turning of the sassafras against the gray stone house

chimney. A smell of wood smoke was drifting into the enlivening freshness of the morning air, sweetening it.

The puppy sneezed, waking itself up, and with the sneeze banged its nose on the ground. It did it three times.

Little Randall looked up from his whittling and laughed in affectionate disgust. "You'd think he'd l'arn, wouldn't you?" But at the laughter the puppy clambered down off his lap and started away, his head down. Little Randall called him back, his dark eyes all sober concern. "I didn't go for to hurt your feelin's—"

That was real—and the little boy beside her, looking brown and healthy, and smelling woodsy and sweaty. Roseanna leaped to her feet and dragged him up with her.

"Come on. If you're goin' with me, you got to go clean. The way you look now, if it turned out to be dark night, we'd lose you."

Little Randall grumbled, but he went. "Coldest water I ever stuck one toe in," he protested, of the icy creek. He dived in, looking as though he thought it were the end, and came up with the announcement it had taken the skin off his back. Roseanna too came out aching with cold the first time, but the next time it was glorious.

Phamer and his wife Bess stopped by in the wagon, on the way to the rally. Until he had married the slight girl with the steady eyes, Phamer had been a good deal like his brother Tolbert. Roseanna had heard somebody say once of Tolbert that he was the nicest fellow a body would care to meet, easygoing, and the mildest lot of concentrated hell you ever saw. Phamer had never started as many fights as Tolbert, but he had never backed down from one either. And if it had looked like a good day to go fishing, that's

what both boys had done. But marrying had given Phamer purpose. He came in now carrying the baby.

"Phamer's plumb fool about that young'un," smiled Bess, in an aside to Roseanna.

"He ought to be. It's a downright pink angel—" of the child looking small and pink and heavenly sweet.

"And he can be a little red devil, too," said Phamer complacently. "You ought to hear him holler sometimes."

The whole household gathered around, the children quickly. A baby in the house was always something new to play with. Roseanna's mother came in from the kitchen, wiping her hands on an apron that was flat around her gaunt shanks—a woman who had known her cares but kept whole. She wiped her hands and held them out for her child's child.

"Tooth trouble," she discovered, of his chewing his fist. "Allifair," she ordered, "go get a cabbage heart for the poor little thing to bite on." The poor little thing, evidently any time anyone wanted to play with him, was quite willing to forget his teeth. "Just as well to forget the whole idea of teeth anyway," advised his grandmother, "they're just a grief. You no more'n get 'em in, till you start worryin' about gettin' 'em out."

The baby grinned at her companionably, and so ridiculously that Roseanna, standing back, laughed. "Don't believe he's takin' you too serious. Look at him." The baby had a homemade horse clutched by its corncob leg in one chubby fist, and with the other was jamming the cabbage heart in his mouth and working at it lustily.

"La," remembered Bess. "I most forgot. Phamer told me you'd been given the promise of goin' today, Roseanna, and I fetched you my poplin dress. It's out in the wagon."

"Not your best white? Not the one Phamer bought you in Pikeville? Oh, Bess, I couldn't think of it—" Roseanna was racing for the wagon.

Bess trailed her back in through the second part of the big old log house, where the boys slept, to a lean-to Roseanna had of her own. And that meant a great deal to Roseanna to have a room of her own, to come to when she wanted to. She'd painted it gray, with paint she had bought from the Irish peddler who came through occasionally, and it had made a pretty room, with the white china handle on the door. The door she could open and close behind her, with the particular breath of the place waiting her nostrils; a leftoverness from the last time, exactly as she had left it. It had the slightly acrid naturalness of the chestnut clothes chest and bed in it, and faintly that of the dried lavender she kept around for times she felt dainty. There was nothing worse than suddenly to feel dainty and have nothing around to be dainty with. At one side of the room was a shuttered window hole, cut long, so that she could look out first thing to see how the day was doing. The window was open now, to let the morning in.

"Never in all my days have I had a dress like this!" Roseanna hauled off her homespun skirt and sacque and let them lie in a heap as she struggled ecstatically into the new one.

"A perfect fit, she cries, as she rips the seams—"

Bess laughed, and helped her, and as the younger girl emerged flushed and excited and beautiful in it, Bess smiled, just to see her. She stood slender in it, almost too thin, still awkward in her youngness, but holding herself with instinctive imagination.

"You got to keep this dress, Roseanna," she decided.

But that she refused, quickly and sincerely. "It's

just for today. Look at that stylish neckline," she reveled. "Oh the wonder of me!"

"I never in my life," said Bess, "saw anybody have as much fun out of little things."

"Who wouldn't have fun," Roseanna exulted, "with a new dress and a play party to wear it to." Then anxiously, "Do you reckon pa will favor me wearin' it? He's not much for borrowin'."

"Roseanna," Bess told her, "when you're in the mood you are now, you could walk on your hands, and the whole family would think it was the thing to do and start practicin'."

"Well, I wouldn't go that far—" Roseanna was twisting and turning, frankly delighted, before the little square deep-framed mirror. "It doesn't look like it's ever touched water, Bess," of the newness of the dress.

"It's never been worn at all," Bess assured her. She looked at the girl again, in the white dress. "Roseanna, you should marry."

Her little sister Allifair had told Roseanna just the other day that she'd rather be dead than an old maid at twenty. Roseanna had laughed, and swooped the child up in her arms. Small danger of Allifair being an old maid at twenty, already at eight with the quiet genius of homemaking, humming to herself as she'd balance plates precariously, putting them away.

Roseanna turned to Bess, suddenly serious. "If I ever do marry—" she began.

"If you ever marry," interrupted Bess loyally. "Why you've always had men in love with you."

"I've noticed that," Roseanna said dryly, and started taking down her hair.

"Straight as a stick," she said, in disgust. It was not quite dry and she combed it out to no more than its own faint wave about her temples. "Someday the world will be sorry for these tricks it plays me!"

But Bess's interest was with what she had started to say. "I've always hoped it would be Thad, Roseanna. He's a fine man."

At that Roseanna met Bess's eyes in the mirror, soberly. They had been talking, Thad and she, in the mountain way of courtship. Thad had been talking for a long time, and last night she had told him she'd give him her answer today. Even in that much of a promise he had swooped her up exuberantly, holding her so close all she could think of was that the crushing was uncomfortable. Then at the door he had turned and looked back at her still standing by the fire, with the strength to move taken from her. And he had laughed exultantly, at how helpless he had left her, and how strong he felt. And she had laughed back, a little breathlessly, fondly.

Remembering that, a glad grateful thought of Thad came. And the next instant she realized it was only a surface thought; that underneath was some wistful instinct to the contrary.

She went to the window, and stood for a moment. A cloud shadow was moving back and forth across a maple tree on the brush pasture out back. As she watched it, the understirring of restlessness within her deepened.

She turned back to Bess. What she almost had said, at the beginning of the conversation, was that if she ever did marry, she would want it to be as it was with Phamer and Bess. They were people you liked to be around. Their love was sure. And now the baby was just one more thing in

their pride in each other. But instead of quite saying that, she said, lightly,

"If I ever do marry, I'm agoin' to have me a dress just like this. And I'll add me a train—" The delighted idea picked up on its own momentum. "I'll have a train that'll swish out behind me clear across the room!"

Bess smiled. "You have a good time livin', don't you, Roseanna?"

It was true, she did. Except that at unexpected times this restlessness would strike. She could not call it exactly—except it seemed some driving, burning need in her for the freedom that had been in her people's seed from the beginning. And she would look at her family and think, "I love you all very much. You are the best of anything I'll ever know. But someday I'm going to run away." Not to seek happiness. She was happy as it was, many times; in laughing with the young ones here at home, in excitement, in the good rhythm of the shuttles at the loom, in dancing—and in talking with Thad. But still there would come without warning that pointless smashing crying out for freedom of everything in her.

But she had not run away. Times her father, when the presence of his enemy so near across the river had galled him beyond enduring, must have wanted to go someplace far. Men had walked off in the dark before. It had been done. But Old Randall never had. He had stayed by, pushing his violence under. Most people, she supposed, lived two lives, their own, and the one on top, for the safety and happiness of the people around them. Every life, likely, had its substitutions, with the substitutions the richer for the effort that was put into them; but by the same token, times a heaviness lay with that effort.

So there would come a need for exhilaration, more than the people around her could give. And she would think of trying some of her father's corn liquor from the jug in the scuttle hold. And put the idea away almost before it came, knowing it wasn't that kind of exhilaration she wanted, if it would leave her head heavy afterward, as it did the men. Perhaps it was just some human experience rarely warm, without too much of it, that she wanted. Or just some rare human experience. It was the kind of thing the wind almost could give, on some high place, when she would stand with her head up and her heart ready, feeling her soul widening out to take life anyway it came, and feel honored. Even when she knew her days were good days, full days, yet they could be without depth of content. Then she would have a feeling, not restless, but just there that she wasn't living today for itself; that she was putting it in, waiting for tomorrow. And then tomorrow would be today, and she would wonder if that something would come which she felt with a lift of sureness, a lift of heart would—

Today. This was the day she was to give Thad his answer. The definiteness of it, the importance loomed as something suddenly formidable. All at once Roseanna wished she had not made that promise. And while in reality she would not have exchanged earlier days for this one, for a surprised moment she found she was having to fight to keep the tears back, remembering the time when people in themselves had not mattered. Not even the consciousness of Thad beginning to seek her out, except as sure background; when all of them who had grown up together had been perfectly happy in the natural things.

A Sunday night, of years ago now, came sweeping back to her. Thad had stopped by to go with her people to

church. The fire in the soapstone fireplace had been red and sweet smelling, with Phamer leaning beside it against the mantel picking out idle chords on his banjo. They'd all fooled around and complained because it was raining, because it was Sunday and there was church they had to go to. The old folks already had taken the least ones on in the wagon.

Then they'd put on coats and old hats, and Tolbert had rummaged for a lantern and not found one, but Roseanna didn't care. She preferred stumbling along in the dark anyway. They'd headed for the church house, a good piece down the road and up a hill that overlooked the town by a beautiful but soul-trying ascent. . . .

Taking the short way across the hollow to stop by for Sam McCoy, half knowing there was no use. Sam, the independent sinner, stood in a block of lamplight in the open doorway eating a turnip, his bare feet planted far apart and laughing at them.

Down the boardwalk from Sam's house, the boards missing in the most surprising places. Over a footbridge with the branch railing gone at one end. Easy now down the logs laid crosswise against a landslide—one log gone somewhere along here—watch out for it.

Back to the winding road in the dark of great trees, with the laurel bushes looking black and shiny and big on either side. The road hit a hard base and was fairly smooth and they swung along swiftly. Past the spring where in daytimes Roseanna turned for the long look across to hazy mountains with the sky stripping blue behind them. But tonight it was too dark. They kept their eyes on the road. Tolbert and Phamer went racing ahead and she and Thad tried to keep up.

They stumbled over the roots of the big old hemlock that stood close to a whispering waterstream that came alongside. The smell of pine and dirt rose strongly in the rain. On past Old Abram's sawmill, and his house out of sight back under the hill. They shouted at him for being slow. Until he came, there was no one to lead the singing, and so they'd all take turns, just for orneriness. Abram stooped a little, a quiet man who never raised his voice except to pitch the hymns at meeting. Abram had married a woman with two daughters, one a shrew and the other a charge.

Pick out carefully the steppingstones along this last part of the road, although already everyone was so muddy it didn't matter, and the rain was pouring. They all turned left and started up the church house path, with quakings in the knees three-quarters of the way and going faster—if they slowed down they'd never make it. Breathless they staggered to the top, and drooped against the log front of the church, or dropped to the steps to rest a minute.

Already people had lighted the wall lamps inside. The little church smelled of coal oil and faintly sweet with hearth smoke on clothes, and snuff; and woodsy of its own self. It looked welcoming as they went in.

Old Abram, of course, did not get there until they had struggled through the first wailing hymn—"Away on a mountain, wild and bare"—She and Thad got to laughing because the song had been pitched too high. Bess sat on the bench in front of them and they tied her down by her sash. Silly, foolish, lighthearted.

Sometime during the solemn grandness of Uncle Dyke's roll of scripture the rain stopped. But a white fog had come down over the mountains when they started home again.

They walked without seeing. If they did not talk and did not touch each other, it seemed there was no one else in the world but each one alone, and they were walking on air. A wavering eerie light appeared dimly ahead, and they studied on the strangeness of the moon on such a night. They started frightening each other with witch stories and ghost stories, all deliciously. Only it was not the moon abroad. It was just the light from home.

Little Randall divulged he had some chestnuts stored away, and they all trooped into the kitchen to roast them. Big Willie had come while they were gone, to stay the night. Big Willie put together wrong from head to toe. "Did you ever know an uglier man?" people'd say of him affectionately. Ears like something somebody had stepped on, a big hulk of a nose, and all of him strung loosely. He looked like something somebody had tried to make who was practicing, and gotten discouraged. Once Tolbert had said he could pile up a better man than that himself. But when Big Willie tucked his fiddle under his chin, no one thought to remember what he looked like, in the sweetness of the sounds he made. Big Willie sat with them around the kitchen hearth, and played his instrument. They sang "I could have married a king's daughter" and "Hey ding dang diddle all day." . . .

Roseanna would not have exchanged this day now for those that were gone. Yet the freedom, the soul freedom, it was in her to need had come so easily then. And that feeling was food and drink to her; love, shelter—it could open its arms and she was right and sure in them. It was like love, she supposed; even though it went badly sometimes, you would not change it, change all it was by cries in the heart, by inward hunger and wildness.

"Bess, I'm unhappy," she said, so woefully Bess was astonished.

"Why?"

"I don't know," Roseanna said, and then, inconsistently, "and if I knew I wouldn't be any happier."

Bess laughed at that, and shook her head, and Roseanna laughed a little, too. But she knew one thing. She had come to the end of all she could be, by herself. Suddenly, for the first time in her life she felt tight, cramped, small. If she was to go on, it must be by some power bigger and sweeping, as she was not.

The door handle jangled, with the door itself yanked unceremoniously open and banged back against the wall. It was a good healthy sound and she was glad to hear it. She had been thinking too much. Although she commented,

"Can't you ever just open a door and walk in, Little Randall? Yank, bang, jang!"

Little Randall considered this. "Jang, yank, bang, ain't it?" he corrected.

"Wrong again," Roseanna told Bess dryly. While he argued Little Randall was standing on the clothes she had dropped. "One side, Light Foot," she requested.

He obligingly moved his foot just over. Roseanna gathered up her belongings from under the puppy's feet as well, who had come in with Little Randall and was worrying its play stick ferociously. Suddenly, wanting its master to play too, it dropped the stick and gave a short, impatient bark. Little Randall threw the stick into the next room and as the puppy went tearing after it, the boy remembered what he had come for.

"Phamer says," he reported to Bess, "to ask you if you're

goin' to keep him standin' like this all day, or don't you want to go to the rally."

"What in the world were you two doin'?" demanded Phamer when they hurried back to the front of the house—Bess a little guilty.

But Roseanna, assured in her new dress, her pure cut face fresh and alive, with the soft hair streaming back from it as she came sauntering in like some young thing against the wind, unconsciously lifted the air of the whole room.

"Isn't it the prettiest thing you ever laid eyes on?" she exulted, of the dress.

Her mother looked at her a little startled, and glad—in wonder, as though it were a lovely thing that had been done, this girl.

"It becomes you, honey," Sarie smiled at her, at the delicacy of the fair coloring brought out by the white. "That was thoughted of you, Bess," she said, of the dress. Then to the blithe Roseanna, a little sternly, "You ought to be good to Bess for this."

"Surely, surely," she assented lightly. "Mustn't cut off the source of supply."

"You'll lay 'em down in rows today," laughed Phamer, of her high spirits as well as the dress.

"If you see any new men at the rally," she told him, "tell them you've got a sister. What do *you* think of it?" She went over a little awkwardly to the big old bed in the corner of the room where her father and mother slept and where the baby had been put with his poppets. He was looking happily disheveled by now and slobbering lavishly. His mother had gone outside to the wash basin to get him spruced up again for the rally, but for the moment he evidently figured he might as well be comfortable.

Roseanna stood watching him a moment, as he exhausted all his horizontal possibilities. He turned over, both ways, from his stomach to his back, and from his back to his stomach. Then, to get at the corncob horse, he turned himself all around on the bed, his head where his feet had been a minute before, and contemplated the ceiling thoughtfully.

"You're a cute little 'old trick," she told him. Then, delightedly, "I think he knows me!" At least he grinned and made a vigorous little overture of a grunt as she came within his line of vision. Roseanna felt all at once as excited over that recognition as though she'd been bowed to by a king.

Watching the baby, she thought about Bess, and what a fine woman she was, her strength of spirit, her kindness. And in a way, Bess had been right. There had been men who had loved her, she supposed, and she had liked them. But none of them, not even Thad, had commanded of her all the woman she could be. A family might best do that.

There came the yelping and baying of dogs outside. Tolbert, who had been out on his horse dragging an old bear hide over the mountains, with the hounds trailing it to give them the scent for winter hunting, was riding into the yard. He headed toward the pen back behind the barn lot where Sarie made the men keep the dogs, away from her ducks.

"How do you reckon them hounds are agoin' to take to the new dog, Phamer?" Little Randall was worried.

Rip was old and mean. Ha'nt, the big white spotted one jealous, and they'd known Lass to be a killer. Roseanna started to tell Little Randall better not take the puppy outside till Tolbert got the others penned. But the boy already

had the little thing out on the doorstone and was putting him down. Roseanna went to the doorway, not knowing what would happen. The big dogs, at sight of the new one, turned with one consent and pounded toward it, curiously, but pounding; barking and yelping.

But the crazy little dog took one look at the approaching horde, started a rumble in its throat that came out a terrific growl—and the big dogs jumped back two feet, in shock.

"You never can tell in this world who's going to jump who," commented Phamer, obviously relieved, too. And Little Randall, as his dog came swaggering back to him, gave that funny, high laugh again that comes of the glad and proud heart that almost has tears in it—

A strange day, in its mixture of very much that came rushed and muddled, with the clear essence of it never quite reached; but on the other hand, beautiful, clear flashes.

Tolbert, as a final preparation, took his pistol from its holster. He examined it, then shoved it between his jeans and his shirt in front, and buttoned his vest over it.

Old Sarie, watching him, at the last minute was hating to see Roseanna go. "There'll be rough men there," she said, in foreboding.

Roseanna came back to the doorway, to bid her farewell again, reassuringly. "They won't be rough today." Men weren't really very rough, she'd decided, unless they had cause to be. Look at the men in her own family. And hadn't her father gone the long way around today to avoid trouble? And even Tolbert was carrying only his pistol.

Today the McCoys were riding down out of the hills in different fashion than they had ridden to Racoon Hollow. That day every hard faced man had gone not only with his

pistol at his belt, but one tucked in each boot and another strapped under his shirt; his belt heavy with extra cartridges. That day the usual rifle had been carried in the crook of the left arm, leaving the right hand free, should riding hard become suddenly necessary. But today Old Randall had given orders that no man was to go with more than one weapon, as a sign of peace.

"This is a jollification!" Roseanna reminded her mother gayly. "Randall, you tote my pies for me, will you?"

"Beast of burden," complained Little Randall, but he took the basket of them and put them across the saddle in front of him.

Roseanna rode with Tolbert, sitting pillion fashion behind him.

The three-mile road winding down out of the hills from the McCoy place into the town was one that kept men profane fixing brakes and broken axles from wagons that crawled up over long sloping rocks and dropped off with a jar. In places the road looked like old scars, with its deep ruts added to by others. But traveling it today, Tolbert began to whistle.

The lines on Tolbert's face had not been put there by work or worry. One could tell. Tolbert was a good time fellow. And at his whistling, Roseanna teased,

"Mary Stafford couldn't be goin' to this rally, could she?"

"She made some give out about it," he admitted.

"It's a wonder you wouldn't have taken her yourself."

"I carry you to a doin's, and you quibble!"

Roseanna laughed, and guessed the real reason she was riding on the pillion seat instead of Mary was that Tolbert

shied away from any permanent strings. "Short, rough and sweet," he had grinned once, of his affairs.

There was the bluest sky in the world as they started out that day, the sky that runs back of the pines. The mountains rose up wild and free against it, like a piece of creation done in a moment of extravagance and never regretted. Even the little slab houses of the town, when they got to it, sitting around carelessly in the sun had an air of festivity.

The town sat in a bare space, where the road forked toward the county seat at Pikeville in one direction, and crossed Tug River into West Virginia in the other. The rally was being held in a field, on the other side of the store by the river. But the rocky little dividing stream was out of sight behind the trees that lined its bank, and evidently out of mind, judging by the buzz and beam of amiability in the field. Already more people were gathered than Roseanna ever had seen at one time before.

Women were there in their best linsey skirts and starched white waists and sunbonnets. There were younger ones who had come for the dancing, as she had. Older ones from out-way cabins, their least ones clinging to their skirts, had come hungry for woman talk, or to stand in talkless groups together, staring vacantly, drawn close by their lack of interests. Some of them already were spreading foodstuffs on rough tables at one side of the field.

The little Irish peddler was there, Roseanna saw, throwing his feet out as he walked, which gave him a kind of jauntiness as though he were walking up hill on his heels. He was busy setting up shop, spreading his wares to best advantage on his wagon.

In the center of the field was a big oak tree. Ostenta-

tiously against its trunk, their metal barrels gleaming in the sun, rifles were stacked; one more way to tell all and every that this was to be a day of lawmaking, and not trouble. Over under a spruce there was a long line-up of jugs, thoughtfully provided by the backer of the candidates, for the voters to judge their fitness by. Already most of the men were enthusiastically sampling the jugs' mighty contents, trying out their contestants' qualifications.

Big Willie was there. Roseanna saw him untying his instrument from a big red handkerchief.

Everybody who looked up as she came riding in, seemed fair surprised.

"There's Roseanna McCoy!" they called out, as though they were glad to see her there. "How you, Roseanna?" The girl felt a glow at that, and gave back their greetings warmly, although shyly—she didn't know how to do with so many. People were still something she looked ahead to. But it was good to have them glad to see her, and to see them in return. There were people there from all around, she saw eagerly, recognizing a few—clear from the head of Blackberry Fork, and from Stringtown, and even from Pikeville. Friends were like warm spokes of a great wheel, she thought impulsively, that someday would reach around the world. Someday, she decided, she'd know people from everywhere, although likely they'd be about the same as these right here along Tug River: the heart beats about the same.

"Well," Tolbert turned in the saddle and looked at her, just sitting there. "We're here," he reminded.

Roseanna started, and laughed a little, and slid down. Little Randall rode up with the basket.

"Thank you for totin' it, Little Randall."

"Oh that's all right. If you ever want anything like that done again just call on somebody else."

"I will," she took the basket gayly. And stopped still, her gaze caught by someone she had never seen before. Nor did she quite see him then, except for his eyes. They were the brightest eyes she had ever looked into. Laughter was in them, and daring; and back in, a soberness in their warmth. She stood held by them. She felt happy and excited, without knowing why. She tried to draw away, and could not.

Two intent lines drew down between the other's eyes, and his look narrowed, in questioning—of himself, of her, of their meeting.

Roseanna broke off then, and haughtily rearranged the basket lid, that did not need rearranging. She felt all at once shaken, as from some force unknown to her. And from under her sunbonnet brim she had to look again.

But the stranger was turning away, abruptly, with an imperious impatience to the gesture. Curiously then, she stood studying him. The cartridge belt slanted across his hips, the flannel shirt, the homespun jeans tucked into his high boots; there was nothing unusual about them. And that daring and laughter she had known in men before; it was a part of the unabated, tumultuous passions that older people looked on tolerantly as going naturally with a man's being young. But watching the way this one stood, the way he walked as he turned away, in his whole bearing there was something potent to be felt. He was someone to be noticed in a crowd, although he seemed alone. Only a few people, and those she did not know, spoke as he passed. The ones she did know made way for him silently.

There came a bony nudge of an elbow on her arm, that

jarred the girl all over. She looked down, to a woman who had been old so long she seemed not to have changed much in Roseanna's time. The gray hair was harsh, and the face flesh hung loose. She was a cousin, who seemed to feel very close to the clan leader's family. She lived in town, in a musty house. Now she gave an irritating little hack of a cough, as though she had just discovered something nasty in her throat and found a kind of satisfaction in it.

"It's been goin' around he's wild. Looks it, don't he?" she said in an undertone to Roseanna, in a way to suggest she and Roseanna were one and the same mind. She made a gesture meant to be subtle, with a wooden water bucket she was holding, toward where the stranger was throwing a jug up over his shoulder and drinking quickly.

Roseanna could have asked who this man was who could so disquiet her. But somehow she did not want that thumping hand, with its positive commonness, touching the brief encounter. More, given half a chance, the old woman would hold her there while the afternoon wasted, talking; a low monotone flowing on endlessly, revealing a mind capable of taking in only the small things of life, and even these cast on disparagingly, with a mean drab light, but retaining them tenaciously with an amazing faculty for recounting them over and over and never growing tired of them—indeed, her integral smallness feeding on them.

Already she was beginning, and for a moment Roseanna stood listening, ready to say yes and no at the expected places—relieved at least that the conversation was veering away from the stranger. Over the old woman's shoulder, the girl's eyes wandered again toward where he was standing under the spruce. And then, just beyond him she saw Thad. At sight of her, a look of glad surprise came over

Thad's face, and he tried to pull away from someone who was detaining him. And as she had felt once before today, but returning now with the force of panic, Roseanna was not ready to see Thad. She was not ready to give him her answer.

Distracted she came back to the old woman, for once in her life glad she was around.

"You goin' after water, Cousin Zinny? Here, you take my pies, and I'll get the water for you."

"La, you needn't do that, Roseanna. How many pies you bring?" She measured the basket with her eyes—an ordinary sized hickory basket.

"Three—" Roseanna made a hasty exchange for the water bucket.

"Just three?" The old woman gave a smile that was meant to be light. "I fetched a whole trunkful. The pump back of the store don't work, and the water at my place tastes like dead water, this dry weather. I been havin' to fetch it from the spring on up the road. It's quite a piece to go," she mentioned.

It was at least half a mile. It would take Roseanna some time to go there and back, and directly the dancing would start. She could have found someone else to go, but if she stayed, there would be Thad. As she frequently did, Roseanna left the field feeling she was leaving Zinny the victor.

She had been standing at the edge of the crowd, and now she turned away from it, away from the merrymaking she had come to. She went past a woman talking with big troubled eyes to another about canning beans. They both looked up blankly as the girl hurried by. Roseanna felt a scorn of them, of their blank unwearying stares defending

them against what they did not know. She was suddenly tired of people. Or perhaps it was because she was not *of* them. To cut off some of the road, she went through a cornfield.

It grew very quiet as she walked down through the rows, the sound of the crowd and its gayness going on without her, left behind her. There was just the rattling of the drying corn leaves, and one grasshopper. It was a sober quiet, a little like emptiness.

She came out on the road and had not gone far on it, no more than the first turn, till a twig cracked and broke, under a footstep behind her. She glanced back, to the stranger of the rally field coming. At seeing him here, the unexpectedness of it, there came a strange sensation to her breast—half alarm; a sense of having bargained for more than she knew, when she had met that look so directly. She hastened her step, away from whatever it was she had let start with no thought to its end. She tried to go on about her way as though she were not acutely conscious of him behind her. He came up with her, and fell in with her.

"You're Roseanna McCoy," he said.

Roseanna looked up at him, out of the frightened height of heart, at his knowing that. "Yes."

"I'm Jonse Hatfield."

The breath swept from her, even as he was going on to add, that there be no mistake, "Devil Anse's son."

Roseanna dropped the bucket. It seemed to have grown suddenly heavy, or she was weak. It clattered to the ground with a loud sound, on a rock. She bent slowly to pick it up, trying to think what to do. Despite its being so near the town, this was an out-way and lonesome place in the road, out of sight and call of anyone, and obviously he had fol-

lowed to waylay her here. As she bent, so did he. He picked up the bucket and handed it to her. They came up together, and she found nothing to fear in that bright, quizzical gaze upon her. Then it occurred to her that the stranger was fooling her, playing a trick.

"I don't believe it," she told him.

He gave a slight lift to one eyebrow. "You're a right natural lookin' person yourself, to be a McCoy."

They stood in appraisal. And he was the same to Roseanna as he had been in the town, when she had not known who he was. Except that now she had heard his voice. It had quality in it that somehow made her proud to hear it.

She grew confused, recalling forcibly all that had been put blackly before her about the Hatfields from childhood to this day. And there was cause for it. There must be cause. Her father was a man who dealt in facts.

Curiously, almost impersonally then, in her mind she turned from their eyes' meeting back in the crowd at the merrymaking, to the rest of this day that she had come to in such high expectation. And when she looked at it, it was flat; it meant nothing. The shock came then—that feeling of brightness in a crowd.

She laid her confusion before him, in her eyes. There came a faint light of irony to his own; a slight twist to one mouth corner.

"Sit down and let's worry," he invited.

Roseanna laughed—a surprised catch of it, with the problem not so much a problem, suddenly. Involuntarily her head lifted slightly, a laughing light came to her eyes. There was that air of expectancy again to her whole outlook, that had swept into that first meeting back in the rally field. She could not call it, but there was something about

this son of her father's enemy that lifted everything she had ever known of the humdrum and cracked it wide open. She felt all at once giddy, reckless. She slid an eye toward a down log at one side of the road. And hesitated.

"Do you think our folks would take kindly to that?"

"Of course not."

This time she laughed outright, at the brashness, and the matter-of-fact frankness. They stood looking at each other, in strange gayety. It wouldn't last, it couldn't last, but abandoning all their young foolishness to it while it was here—all in the full consciousness of it.

And yet, it seemed a very natural thing to Roseanna that she should sit down with Jonse Hatfield and talk for a while. All thought of anything against it was rolled up behind her someplace, out of sight and sound; all sense of it lost somewhere between here and the rally field.

"I'd like to—for a while."

"Good," he said. And then again, "Good."

They sat down, a little apart, on the log. Roseanna sat primly, with the bucket held beside her. But that was awkward, with his eyes on her even all the time he was drawing a pipe from his pocket. After a minute she hung the bucket on a broken jag at the end of her side of the log.

For a time they sat talkless, but it was not an empty silence. A watchful, eager curiosity was between them, and the tall summer grass around them was making little whispering noises with the wind down close in it. Back in the cornfield crows were calling, their calls clear in the bright quiet. There was sun and wind in that out-way piece of nowhere, and for no reason and several, with that quiz-zical gaze upon her, Roseanna felt suddenly sky high, and alive to everything that lived; and shy.

"Pretty day," she ventured.

Jonse laughed, quickly, as though she had said something surprising. Then he took a look at it himself.

"Didn't mean a thing till you come into it," he told her. "But now—" he made an elaborate gesture, "here the day is."

"Oh," Roseanna scoffed, and flushed.

"Don't believe it, huh?"

"No."

"It's true," he insisted. "I saw you when you first come in. Did you know I was watchin' you?"

She shook her head.

"I was." He said it as though it were an important announcement. "I looked at you a good many times," he informed her.

Not knowing what to do with this turn their talk was taking, that flustered her even while it pleased her, she said, to divert it, "Aren't you goin' to light that pipe?"

The pipe had been lying forgotten in his hand. At the reminder he brought a leather pouch from his shirt pocket and grew intent upon it. Roseanna stole the opportunity to look at him again. It was a long face, long and lean like all the rest of him, with the features cut strong, but stirringly. There was something fine and impelling about the whole cast of it. She began studying him in detail—the hard-boned nose, with the nostril lines slashed down diagonally, the full mouth, and stubborn chin, the weather wrinkles at his eye corners. It was his eyes and mouth, she decided, that gave the face its appeal. She almost smiled, at the definiteness of the part in the dark hair, as though he had had to train it to part. Her eyes fell to his hands, noticing them as she had the quality of his face. She watched as he meas-

ured out the brown fragrant tobacco exactly. He had good hands; strong and lean too, and with a repose. He glanced up. At being caught watching, she felt a startled consternation. The wrinkles around his eyes deepened in amusement. He tamped the tobacco down with his thumb, and looked at her again. "You look different at different times," he decided. "Back yonder, when you first come ridin' in you were, not scornful exactly, but proud—and so cool you scared me. And then you started lookin' out over that crowd like you were holdin' out your hand and sayin' 'Howdy, I'm your friend.' "

At his tone of laughing at her for that, she protested, "But they are." At the moment she didn't even mind Zinny. Zinny was all right, if you humored her along, only it was very, very tiring. Still, if it hadn't been for Zinny she wouldn't be here. And in a fresh surge of the whole day's generosity—her father letting her come, Bess lending her best dress, the greeting of people as she had ridden in—she discovered,

"There are a lot of nice people!"

"There sure are," he agreed, reaching for his matches. "I guess," he added, as he thought about it. "Although I don't like many of 'em."

Roseanna laughed, her seriousness again knocked out of her, but in a way that kept her interest.

"What could have turned you against the world so young?" she wondered.

"The world's all right," he granted, indifferently. "I'm just like the bear goin' across the bridge, one foot at a time—I don't trust the damn thing."

She was suddenly delighted at that companionable swearing. And he had a salty way about him. It wasn't her way,

but she found she was enjoying it in him. "Those some of Storekeeper Davis' new fangled sulphur matches?"

He looked down at the big match in his hand, with interest. "Do you know how much that storekeeper of yours soaked me a box?"

"How much?"

"Ten cents of my hard-earned money."

"I wouldn't put it past him."

"He don't look like the kind who gets much pleasure out of bein' generous," he said dryly.

It was an apt calling of the storekeeper, and she watched with casual amusement, as he struck a flame and held it to the pipe bowl. The tobacco caught, and crawled red. He twisted around, so that he faced her. The arch of his neck was oddly strong for the quizzing in the light of his face.

"We get along," he said.

For a second she grew bewildered by the life, the strength of that twist of body. The warmth of it almost touched her, although she said lightly, "We don't agree about a mort of things."

"We must make a list of 'em someday," he said, in the same way.

They looked at each other, a faint smile in their eyes. There came a pause, with a height, an awareness. To ease it, Roseanna asked, at random,

"How do you earn that hard-come-by money?"

"Mostly run blockade," he replied carelessly. Then he looked at her quickly. "Does that make any difference?"

Roseanna was surprised at the question, and strangely pleased, although she only said, "Why should it?"

In truth, there was no great discrimination in the mountains between the man who sold his corn by the bushel,

and the one who sold it by the jug. And it was the decided universal opinion that none of it, from the first seed in those hard-tilled acres set on edge to the last money that exchanged hands, was any of the government's business. More, the recklessness, the dash Jonse would give to blockade running rather excited her—since, after all, it was no which nor whether to her what he did. But it was dangerous work.

"You're apt to wind up in the jailhouse."

"Nope," he dismissed that carelessly. "I've tried that. But I didn't care for it much—it was too confinin'."

Roseanna laughed. She had to, and found herself regarding him not with abhorrence for the experience, but with a lively curiosity, seeing him with new eyes. He looked very well able to take care of himself, she realized, and no novice at the cool art of self-preservation. She wanted to ask him more about it, sure there would be some tale or other, but he was saying, abruptly.

"Right now I'm loggin'."

And some difference in the way he said that made her look at him again.

"You are? Where?"

"Up back of our place, about a mile, up on a mountain. I got a shack up there where I stay, when I'm cuttin' timber. It's like lookin' out over a white pine forest. But on up a piece, it's rocky; wildest country you ever saw. I've been lost in it, a couple of times, huntin', and had to sleep out. Ever sleep out?" he asked her.

She shook her head, listening.

"After a while a rock starts up through your hip pocket," he told her, "and the wind's so cold you can't see, and you have to hang on to your blanket if you've got one, to keep

it from blowin' into Georgia. Even pick up a stick and pitch it, and it's ten miles away. You stumble over things in that wind. No danger of fallin' off, though—a mountain top's a big thing. And in the mornin' you stick your head in the coldest water ever made—in a rock basin. Then you begin to see the other mountains goin' down, away from you. The mist comes in wisps, you can't see the valley, just the sky. Then down below comes a patch, a field. It's a rough place," he told her.

Whether he meant to or not, there had been a strong draw to that mountain in his words, as he told about it, and she felt almost a homesickness, herself, which was strange, when she had never seen it. But it seemed to rise up before her, in all its greatness and its freshness—and its quiet, despite what he had said about the wind and wildness. It sounded like a place to go to, if you were ever very happy, or very sad.

"You must have a good time there," she said, wistfully.

He looked at her quickly. Although he only said, "Aren't you confused? I go there to work."

Roseanna smiled. This Jonse Hatfield was a rare person, she decided, with an ironic humor that covered up a very real sweetness. "You like the work though, don't you?"

He gave an impatient toss of his head. "I'd like it all right," he granted, "if I could do what I want to with it. As it is, the timber's goin' out to Logan, for a little cash money. There's plenty of pine and oak and basswood though, that would make logs twenty or thirty inches at the stump end. I'd like to start haulin' that to catch the spring floods, float it down to Gatlinburg, then load it on boats and take it down the Ohio to New Orleans. They're payin' high for it down there."

He looked at her in a kind of surprise. "I talk too much."

"No you don't!" She denied it vigorously. There was excitement, right in the middle of her breastbone, about his lumbering—as though it were some venture of her own. And at the vision of the Tug, jammed with big logs on their way to far places, she suddenly felt the world grow sweepingly, thrillingly small. "I like it!"

He smiled, a faint smile more of the eyes than the mouth, and pulled a loose piece of bark from the log, his eyes narrowing on it forgetting about her.

"I've got a lot of crazy ideas rattlin' around in my noggin' about it. One thing, I'd like to see all the poor trees, or the ones with a blight on 'em, that are left standin' now because nobody wants 'em, cut out. They take up room, or pass the blight on. But if you'd clean those out, then the seedlin's would have a chance. And another thing I'd like to do, with the good trees, is pick out the forty-year ones, say, to cut, and leave the fifteen-year timber growing. That way you'd get out the best lumber, and you'd keep the forest thinned so the other trees could grow. You could really start rollin' then; have somethin' that would keep comin' along."

"That doesn't sound crazy! Why don't you do it?"

He broke off. "Because it isn't my say-so, for one reason—which isn't a bad one," he commented.

Roseanna guessed by that it was his father's land, and his father's word.

And at the very thought of their two households, consciously, a silence fell. Jonse got up restlessly, and knocked his pipe out against the water bucket. After a moment he sat down again.

"Pretty dress," he commented.

It was apropos of nothing that she knew, but at the compliment, she looked down at the dress herself, in renewed pleasure. "Do you like it?" she asked him eagerly.

He looked at it, and through it. "You do somethin' to it," he said, with such offhand impiousness that she blushed to the bone. And at his being able to bring that color flooding to her face Jonse laughed aloud, joyously.

Roseanna came to her feet. "I heard you were wild."

He was unconcerned. "Don't you know that half of what you hear isn't so?"

She granted that a second, in silence. Then a quick impishness sprang in her. "But interestin'," she countered.

"Now you're gay, Roseanna McCoy," he said it as though in fresh discovery. "You've got devils in your eyes." And then, astonished, "Hasn't anybody ever made a fuss over you before?"

"Not like this." She liked his teasing, but it bothered her; there seemed a lack of respect in it.

"You should let somebody," he said soberly, as though of someone clear out of all this. "It could be his chiefest pleasure."

"I must get on after that water—they're waitin' for it, for the coffee."

"Always, always the water for the coffee," he bemoaned. Then as she lingered in spite of herself, he said, martyred, "Go on away. Don't bother me. I'm busy. I've got a little piece of bark here I got to tear up in pieces." He started breaking the loose strip of it he had pulled from the log.

Roseanna stood helpless, and exasperated. "Where's my bucket?" She cast around for it.

He got up helpfully, looking around with her, in interest.

"You had it in your hand when you come." And then he suggested, as it struck him, "Look in your hand."

They both laughed, at the ridiculousness of it. Then he looked at her pleadingly.

"Aren't you havin' a good time, Roseanna?"

And suddenly Roseanna knew she was having the best and the most lighthearted good time she could ever remember.

"Then sit down," he begged.

And when they sat down as they were before, he said, "Tell me about you. I've been curious about you, ever since I saw you ride in."

"That was my brother Tolbert I was ridin' with. And Little Randall—he's the funniest little old boy, and he has the feistiest pup." She began telling him about the antics of Little Randall's dog that morning. But there was effort to the telling as though she were suddenly having to make talk with a stranger.

Jonse listened, watching her. But two lines drew down between his brows, and in the middle of something she was saying, he interrupted her.

"You've gone away from me, Roseanna," he said. And then bluntly, "I don't want to hear about your brothers."

His bluntness, and his honesty, stopped her. And she had realized, herself, vaguely, a wrong note in talking about her family. She talked about them with everyone else she knew, told the funny little things that happened. But talking about them to Jonse Hatfield, under the circumstances, was different. Although she had not quite thought about it, until he stopped her. Nor was that the middle of it. That was what *he* had struck, the middle of it—that a distance had seemed to come between them.

But at his bringing it into words, the constraint of that changed. It had a pull, a consciousness of each other in it.

A change was coming over the day. The rustling of the grass was growing to a rushing. The wind was rising. The growing things around them bent and turned in it, and the coloring of everything took on intensity. The sun now was lighting up half a hill at a time with unnatural brightness, and throwing the rest to blue-black.

"Looks like a storm's blowin' up," Jonse said.

They sat indecisively, watching the unexpected storm build up. The sky over their heads darkened rapidly. The strong need of the earth rose around them to meet the rain coming. The wind lifted to a roar in the trees. The empty bucket hanging on the splinter banged and clattered against the log end, and a big laurel behind them shook what stiff old branches it could. There was excitement in that rise of storm. They sat on, letting it come.

Until Jonse said, practically, "We'll get wetted to the bone, sittin' here like this."

He got up quickly, came across to her and picked up the bucket. With his other hand he pulled her to her feet. Their hands stayed. It seemed a simple and a natural thing, her hand in his. He stood a moment, deciding on shelter. She looked up at his face, at the good line of it as he stood so.

"There's a sawmill back off the road here someplace. I went by it huntin' one day."

It was Abram's sawmill that Roseanna had known all her life—and never known at all till now. They made a dash for it, Jonse's hand hard over hers. A strong hard hold it kept, as they stood laughing together in the mill; laughing for no reason, except their breathlessness, and that they had

just made it in out of the rain that was starting. The mill wasn't much, just a small shed with some ramshackle sawing equipment, but it was dry. They stood under the shingle roof, hearing the rain come, and watching it falling all around them outside. A golden summer rain at first, with the sun still in it; a golden look to green things, and to one hill. Then the sun was gone, and the hills went gray, all of them—the ones blue-black and the ones with sun; all were gray like the clouds moving down low and thin, and the rain. Earth and sky and rain were all one and the same gray. A warning crack of thunder built up, and broke directly over them with a roar that went on to rumble echoingly all across the sky.

And then it was over. The wind was sounding again in the trees, drying them, shaking the brief wetting from them. The hills cleared as quickly as they had clouded, and the sun shone.

"It was just a shower of rain," Roseanna said. She felt light somehow, and happy. And impulsively she turned to him, answering his question of awhile ago.

"I'm havin' the best time, Jonse! I'm havin' the best time."

"I know what it is I want to do—" It was as though he had been wondering, and just then knew. What she had taken for abruptness in him was more than that. It was not a jerkiness. It came from something vital and direct in him. He turned, and put his arms around her, at her waist, and for a moment stood looking down at her, his dark eyes questioning, sober.

There was no more planning to it than the fall of rain. It had just come. Roseanna was not quite thinking. It was not a refusal to think, it was just a mindless disregard of

thinking. She felt drawn up high, there in his arms, into a clear kind of dark, a waiting, a translated emptiness. Jonse bent quickly, and kissed her, so light a kiss it seemed scarcely to have been. Roseanna lifted a hand wonderingly, and with her fingers traced the way of his mouth, his temples, then; his hair. She could feel his heart beating against hers, a trembling beginning through his whole body. There came a give, a flow, a melting of her own. He dropped his mouth to her throat at the curve of the shoulder. She stood still, feeling the warm heaviness, the joy of his face there.

"Ah sweet—" it was a sharp intake of breath, as he raised his head. His eyes were pleading, exploring hers. "You could be so wild and sweet a thing, Roseanna."

Roseanna drew suddenly back, the smile she had felt in her eyes gone, her heart all at once a sick thing in her. She grew instantly sick all over, seeing how she must seem in his eyes—in a way that would bring her awake stark in the nights, with shame. She hadn't meant it to end this way. She'd just been having a good time with him, liking him, laughing and talking with him. It had just seemed a time to be happy in. . . . She backed away, in bewilderment. Being in his arms had seemed so natural; something not to give oneself to partially. It would have seemed as natural to have gone on—joyously, wholly, completely.

She dropped her face to her hands. What must he be thinking of her? How could he think anything else but badly of her? How could he? Her guilt, her terrible sense of wickedness as she stood there—and yet, a strange crying out to be good, to have Jonse Hatfield think well of her. And out of her miserableness, that was what mattered, that came up clear; that he think well of her. It became more

important to her than anything she had ever known. But he made no answer. After a time that seemed forever, she looked up, in despair.

He was looking at her with a slight, odd smile. "I like you," he said.

She had wanted him to think well of her. But for all that, she could only look back at him wonderingly, in humility, at his understanding.

"Come on," he picked up the bucket, "I'll carry you on to that spring."

They started going singly, along Abram's footpath to the road. The way was tangled and Jonse went ahead, clearing it for her, holding back switching branches, thoughtfully, but impersonally. Roseanna was relieved at that impersonalness. She began to feel light again, a lightening of that weight of shame and miserableness. Once she stopped to break off a handful of the blue asters that seemed everywhere. Asters were fragrant things, not sweet exactly, but fresh. They smelled deeply fresh. Her sunbonnet had fallen back to her shoulders, from that moment in the mill. She started to pull it back up, and then let it stay, and instead put the flowers in her hair. Everything was right between Jonse and her again, with the moment back in the mill somehow now a right part of it, too, giving it wholeness. Everything was right. She hurried to catch up with him.

"I'll remember this day forever!"

"So'll Governor Knott, likely," he returned.

Roseanna stopped short, as though she had been thrown back. She was puzzled. Jonse was so flat, so indifferent, just when she thought everything was so right between them. She went on, following, having to go fast now to keep up—

he seemed in a hurry to get this over with. His head was high as he strode ahead.

For a while they were silent. She had felt so relieved at first. But now an odd disappointment made the relief restive—because she felt somehow that she had disappointed Jonse; that she had hurt him. They seemed apart, as Jonse had said before back on the log. But then, even as he had said it, there had been a knowing with them, an intimacy. Now, as they walked apart, their physical separation seemed bringing a separation of the spirit as well.

They went on, impersonally, with no remnant left of those earlier moments with their warm live gladness—except that the man in front of her was growing increasingly important in her mind. She was finding it absolutely necessary to her sense of well-being to keep sure that he was still thinking well of her. He was right. They should be impersonal now. And although it was putting a constraint between them, she went along with it.

“How do you reckon the rally’s comin’ on?”

“They’ve likely got the governor elected and startin’ to complain about him,” he said, shortly.

At the shortness a retort sprang to Roseanna’s own mind, with a sharpness surprising her. But she held back. After a space, she tried,

“It all seemed fair and fellowy, back yonder—” taking it that other Hatfields beside Jonse had come.

“They’ll love each other so long as the liquor holds out.”

Roseanna gritted her teeth till her jaws ached. In just about another minute she’d decide a few back teeth weren’t worth one man more or less carrying her to the spring and she’d tell him out. The reason it was being a day of peace

was because her father had taken care it should be. Then, despite her rankling, she was seized with a curiosity about the leader of the Hatfield clan, now because he was Jonse's father, and because of something else—a groping excitement in the back of her mind that almost she had hold of but not quite.

“Did your father come, Jonse?”

“No.” He cut her off coldly, as though she had no right to ask, as though she were intruding. But he added, in a more normal trend of conversation, “He didn’t want trouble.” And then, defiantly, out of something that had been brooding in him and about to take shape, he said, “I’m beginnin’ to think neither side’ll ever quite win this fight or quite lose it, anyhow.”

But Roseanna had drawn back in and away, hurt from that first quick cutting down. Now she flared.

“*He* didn’t want trouble? Why do you think *my* father stayed away?”

Jonse turned around, with a puzzled lot of hardness gathering in his eyes—as though he wondered just what kind of a woman it was he had with him.

“It’ll be all right with me, if you want to split up,” he said, “right here and now.”

Roseanna stood silent, and sorry. And astonished at herself. She could never in her life remember having quarreled with anyone like this, at such small things, and so unreasonably. She had leaped on the one barbed remark that rankled, and not even heard until too late the rest of what he had said.

After a moment they walked on, but he was closed against her. A barrier had come between them.

They had clashed increasingly, at every mention of their

two families. And if it had not been actual clashing, their very care not to all along was beginning to make it plain, in spite of their blithe disregard of it at first, that it was an insurmountable barrier. Yet she still felt, like a battering persistence now, that they were important to each other—not in any way like that moment back at the mill, but just as friends. Jonse Hatfield's friendship seemed suddenly vitally important to her. And it might be, it could be important in the ending of this trouble. That was the glimpse that had come to her; what she had started to say—perhaps what Jonse had started to say. It was all mixed up with that black night two years ago. She had felt groping then, but remote. Now, perhaps she and Jonse together—

“Jonse,” she approached it awkwardly in her eagerness, “do you reckon, about all this, that when we get back, we could have one dance together?”

They had come to a hemlock, whose roots had been washed by the creek when it was flowing full, but the roots stood bare and dry now in the summer ebb of water. Jonse stopped, and stood staring across the creek. Roseanna waited. It might be this would be a turning point in the trouble between the two houses, when neither side really wanted trouble—to have Old Randall McCoy's daughter and Devil Anse's son dance together, friends. Jonse said nothing. She endured the silence that grew long almost calmly. It began to take the form of a kind of test. She waited to see what he would do for her, in something that was important to her. She began to speculate on the cause of his silence. He might want to dance with her, and not think it was a wise thing. Or he might have some better idea, of his own, about the matter. Happen he was not staying for the dancing. She was calm because she knew, what-

ever he did or didn't do about it, this day at least would have no trouble in it because her father had ordered it that way.

A crack came in the calmness. If he were being silent from personal disinterest in her, she would know what hate was. A strange, violent meeting, this, with no peace.

Jonse turned, his mouth an odd, twisted line as he looked at her. "I wouldn't dance with you, Roseanna, back there at that rally, if you were"—he paused, impatiently, searching for something emphatic enough—"if you were the most beautiful girl in the world."

Something happened she had not counted on. At the lack of sureness of himself, in this, in his answer, and the lack of pride in her—she felt all her interest in him die. She felt it dry up and harden to a cold nothing inside of her.

"I'm goin' back across the Tug and go squirrelin'," he said tersely.

"That's a good idea." She turned coldly on her heel.

As she walked on, the dried hard thing within her turned to fury. She was all right for him to meet secretly, to sweet talk with in the woods, to take freely in his arms. She gave a wrench of her shoulders, as though to wrench herself physically free from the humiliation and shame of that memory that came again now with a sickening sweep. But he wasn't proud enough of her to dance with her in the sight of his own people. And that she, Roseanna McCoy, should have humbled herself, and tried to placate him: *she* placate *him*. Her self-derision was terrific. It was almost funny. She laughed aloud, in the humor that was rising at the whole turn of it. The laughter of irony that comes through clenched teeth. For the first time in her life Rose-

anna McCoy did know what hate was. Her father had been right. There was no good in the Hatfields. At that moment she could have seen Jonse Hatfield cut up in pieces before her very eyes and never turned a hair.

The hardness grew hot inside of her, as though she had swallowed something burning, that strangely had tears in it. She began to listen, to see was he changing his mind, and coming on.

A woods road can be a tormenting thing, a cruel thing—lying behind her so dark and inanimate and unendurably silent, when if it would, it could spring with life; a twig could crack under a footstep and sound like all the joy bells in the world ringing, like life singing in its harsh break, ripping the gloom. She walked on, shaking now, and tense; waiting, listening for the sound of his step. And maybe there would come no step at all.

Her throat was tight, and ached. She thought of a dozen excuses to go back to him, and put them by, knowing how more than ever impatient he would be, how annoyed at having her bring it up again. Especially when he was off to go squirreling. When a man starts out hunting and catching, he doesn't want to be weighed down by a woman, particularly a woman he has to gentle and hand feed. A silly bit of considerateness, now, that, it occurred to her. And she had cut him short, just when he was beginning to trust her, maybe to iron out some of the wrinkles, for themselves at least, in this trouble, by bringing it into the open and talking about it. And she had flared and ruined everything. Everything that had been before even that. She felt a sickness that was deeper than terror at the thought that she had thrown all that away.

She looked down. The bucket! Jonse still had it. She turned and ran.

He was still standing where they had quarreled. She stopped, flushed before him, and wry.

"Do you have my bucket, too? You seem to have everything else—my independence—"

His eyes grew bright on her again, with something warm and glad at her coming back, that gladdened her, too, although she stormed, astounded at herself.

"I'm a prideless fool!"

"No you aren't," he denied it quickly. "No you aren't, Roseanna." He was standing by the hemlock, one hand leaned against it. After a moment she came and stood beside him, so near they almost touched. Her whole being ached and cried with longing for that touch. But she only leaned back against the tree, her head against the trunk. He did not move, and neither did she. He gave a short, humorless laugh.

"It wouldn't be so bad, if you hadn't felt so right in my arms."

Roseanna looked at him, straight into his eyes and answered his directness with her own, "And your arms felt as I've always thought arms should feel."

They were silent. Then Jonse said, "This has been going on a long time between us, Roseanna."

An hour can be long in the time of the swift force of this that had happened to them. Revolutionary changes had come with moments that should have taken years. And yet they had taken years, gathering this force, waiting for all this, to reveal itself. And from some impelling honesty between them now, about themselves, she said,

"You were right about goin' back across the Tug, and

not back to the merrymakin'. We wouldn't get on. We'd quarrel. And we're too much man and woman together to really settle quarrelin' any other way except in each other's arms."

He looked down at her intently, and walked away a few steps and came back. "I think you're right." He said it seriously, as if agreeing with her on an important matter, almost impersonally.

What a queer two people they were finding themselves to be, who had to go so to the core of things to keep things clear between them, whether or not there was any use or sense to it. And there was no sense to this—none the world would understand. She did not understand it herself. It was merely so.

"When you come," he said, "I was standin' here thinkin' what a damn fool I was to let you go. If you hadn't come back, I'd have come to you. I'd have had to see you again."

Roseanna turned her head against the hemlock. For a moment she watched the way a branch and its shadow dipped in the water—having to go a long way to reach it in the summer narrowing of the creek, after the spring floods that had broken against its very roots—

Yet at his even wanting to see her she felt a flooding in of life again herself, filling her with a good consciousness of it, almost a physical aching. There were so many ways for life to be full, to be good. As this moment was. She realized the danger of even acknowledging the state, knowing from just this last hour that it is when life is at its crest that the wave breaks, and sucks back, leaving an empty shore. But by the same token, the flood will come back, and back again. So long as there is the force of the flood,

and the land to wait for it; so long as there is life and the ability to receive it—so long as there is man and woman.

A faint mocking smile came. She turned back. "What were you aimin' to do? Come ridin' up to my door?"

He was silent for a moment, in acknowledgment of the hopelessness of that. "We could meet out—"

She shook her head quickly. "I couldn't do that, Jonse. This time it just happened, but I couldn't meet you out, seein' you in sneakin' ways. You don't know how I'd hate that. You don't know how I'd hate it!" She told him fiercely.

"Yes I do," he contradicted definitely. "Yes I do." Then, impatiently, "But I couldn't go back to that crowd now, either; seein' you just like everybody else, talkin', if we talked at all, about things that wouldn't mean anything to either of us—not feelin' near you—"

And that was something she knew—the need to be near. As though she had given the need voice, he came to her, and tucked her hand in the crook of his arm, and covered it with his. "Leastwise I can walk to the spring with you. This time clear there."

They walked along together. His face bent toward her often now. Once he started to say something, but instead looked ahead quickly, his smile curious. She looked up at him inquiringly.

"I was just thinkin' I'd remember this."

"What?"

"That I'm not havin' to shorten my steps, walkin' with you—and the way your shoulder fits under mine."

And she would remember, too. "Nobody would ever believe, to look at us, not even if we told them, that we're Roseanna McCoy and Jonse Hatfield."

"We won't tell them."

"No," she said sadly and after a moment, "I was sorry we quarreled, Jonse."

"No sorrier than I was."

"I didn't mean that, about the dancin'."

"Sure you did," he said.

"But it was only such a little of the whole of it!"

He laughed a little. "I was glad to see you come back. I was beginnin' to think maybe that's all you were thinkin' of, and I'd been dropped out."

That wasn't even worth answering. But from the whole uselessness, the waste of it, she said, "What's caused this warrin' between our people, Jonse?"

He shook his head. "Just two strong clans, I reckon, led by two strong men—with the word of both of 'em the law among their own. And when they differed, the whole lot differed. Some misunderstandin' started. One thing's led to another, till now it's a struggle for which one's goin' to have power over the other. Right now neither your father nor mine wants trouble. But if some should start, they'd just naturally take action. You and I just happened to have met each other, and understood each other, and so have a different view on the whole thing. I knew that's what you meant, by our dancin' together. But—" and this he said hard, as though what he had to say had been fought through each phase, but the trail it left was sure—"there's nothin' we can do about it, Roseanna. And we're not goin' to trifle with the lives of about twenty-five people," he said definitely, roughly estimating the members of both their families, "tryin' it!"

He was right. She knew that. And marveled, even in the hopelessness of anything in it for them that way, at the

clarity of his thinking. That was what he had been thinking when he had stood so silent by the creek.

They went on slowly, warding off the end. And when they had come to the spring, the parting place, he put down the bucket, and with his two hands took both of hers, looking at them. Then he stood searching her face, the way of her hair, earnestly, as though he were putting the image in his mind and heart and saying, finally, "I think I know, now, what you look like."

She stood hearing the soberness of his tone, the break in it; seeing the sweetness of his mouth, which was surprising in the strongness of his face. And she knew that for her a persistence that would keep present in everything would be the almost beautiful kindness of his eyes, which was strange, when at first she had just thought they were the brightest eyes she had ever seen. She stood looking at him, held back from him by a wall of hatred, put there by neither of them, but there. And in the desperation of the impossibility of all of it, she said, out of the whole held-back tightness,

"Take me in your arms again, Jonse. Just one more time take me in your arms—if you want to."

And she knew then that no matter how long a time would pass, his face that she would have forgotten to think about would suddenly be before her in all its intentness at that moment, its goodness, its gentility, its wanting.

"You don't know how much," he said.

They were hard in each other's arms. They clung together, pressing through flesh and bone to something great and terrible and wordless beyond. It was like a dream of hunger. But sharing the dream, it rested, the need then not

final, but implicit. And only as much of the hunger stayed on as dreams leave; a high ecstatic wanting.

The amazement then, at tenderness; the tenderness of his arms about her, strongly, rightfully now; the seriousness of his kiss, the naturalness of it to her, the rightness of it, the deepening. Her first real lover's kiss—his mouth on hers, that life on hers. Something happened. Something changed. The whole world changed with that kiss its real self for the first time. His lips touched her cheeks, her eyes then; it was tender, lovely, wondering.

When they drew apart the deep brightness of their eyes seemed coming from so far in it was almost quiet, and wondering with the wonder of itself.

"We're just two people—" he said slowly.

With a wall of old hatred between them, barriered the more for a while by their own pride. Two people, two worlds; wary, guarded. But with his arms around her, and her surrender to them, the barriers were gone. It was as though the walls fell, like the walls of Jericho, revealing something they had known from the first to be there, but were amazed at its beauty.

YOU'VE not heard a word I been sayin'," accused Little Randall, of her sitting there on that rock like it was a timeless while she had. "I might as well to been talkin' to the wind."

All things cry in the wind, the hemlocks and the laurel

and the water stream, when you are being separated from someone you need to be near; not separated by distance, but by life.

Roseanna sat still and empty, thinking of everything that mattered to both their families they would have risked by not saying that farewell. There was a laxness to her body, yet her head was high, and her breasts. It was a high kind of emptiness, knowing that the thought of him would come unexpectedly in the middle of anything she would be doing, from now on, and she would stop, and go back over that farewell. And that it would happen oftener and oftener, and she would begin, instead of thinking of their parting, to imagine how it would be if ever they should meet again. And her heart, that had had a good hurting in it, now in the full knowing there never could be another meeting—just hurt.

“Are you acomin’, or not?” demanded Little Randall.

She sat perfectly still. Except that her whole body was limp now, and her arms hung down at her sides; her head drooped. It was all over. The amazement and the sense of happiness it had left. She closed her eyes a second, in finality, and she felt the tears that were there, on her lashes. They seemed not to have come, but to have been there always.

“I’m comin’, Little Randall.” She got slowly to her feet, picked up the bucket, and knelt to fill it at the spring.

A small quiet pool of water at the base of a rock, quiet like the quiet of something fed eternally from clear depths, deep and dark and sufficient as God.

—And suddenly she wanted so desperately to talk to Jonse. She thought she could not endure it not to. True, they had talked, and it had been good to laugh, knowing

not a word was meant seriously, and then to talk seriously; but so little of all that could have been. She had a feeling they could talk out to each other as few people did. And now there seemed so many things to say, just little things, as well—a thousand things; and tomorrow there would be two thousand. She had thought the last of their strangely beautiful time together had been complete in itself—something they had known, even though they could not have. But it was not enough to know. It was odd, it was not definitely physical, nor mental, nor spiritual, this need of communication with him. There was no one feeling to it—but it was there, and would be consuming all of her that she should use otherwise.

She straightened, and scrambled to her feet. "Come on, Little Randall!"

At her starting up so suddenly, the boy gaped. "There's no accountin' at all nohow for you!" Then, "Roseanna!" picking up the water she had forgotten, and starting to run after her with it, the water spilling over the sides. "You forgot what you come for—"

Roseanna raced ahead, unhearing, running to the hemlock where he had been before. He might be there again this time. It was agony waiting to see.

He was not there. The bottom dropped out of the world with disappointment, and with desolation that she had sat so long dreaming, she had missed him. She came to the mill, and started past it slowly. Until she remembered he could not go home without his horse. He would have to go back to the rally field for his horse. She ran on, recklessly, heedless of stones and roots in her way.

"Hey! Hold up!" Little Randall was calling from some outrun distance behind her. "I'm tired; I've already done

wore my legs out for you, and I don't aim to sprint the last fifty yards," his voice lagged out, disgruntled.

Roseanna went tearing through the cornfield, straining through it, as though she were straining through toward the real thing that lay between them. Or maybe the real thing wasn't there. Maybe it was an illusion. Or maybe, when they got to it, they'd begin to think badly of themselves for even indulging the desire to find out, since it was being unfair to the best effort at control on both their families' sides. And when it became a wrong thing in their minds then they would become shabby people, and that would be the dusty and ashamed end of something, that for an hour of illusion, or just for an hour, had been deep and wild and glorious.

But the physical disturbance even this thinking of him caused was something she had never known before. As she pushed her way on through the corn rows, nearer the possibility of seeing him, there came a sudden burning sensation to her breasts, a sinking feeling, as though something had struck heavily and were falling hotly. She didn't think it could even be listed under the heading of love. There was none of the unselfishness, the faithfulness, that went with what she knew of love. The very fact of her rushing heedlessly to see him again—and (she knew now, he would be there) his still being there to see her too, showed they didn't have that faithfulness: the courage on her part of being faithful to people who were better than she was, who were great by very goodness and generosity of spirit—like Little Randall, and Bess and Jed and her father. Most of all her father, under such stress to keep his hatred under control, but keeping it under, And no doubt Jonse had the same, on his side.

Yet there was nothing evil in it either. Perhaps it was merely the nervousness before some important meeting—and this would be important. She would tell him, once and for all, it was something that could not be—

But she did not need to tell him. When finally she fumbled with the last stalk of corn, and pushed it aside crookedly, and he was there, coming back for her—the telling was in itself. It was in the helplessness of their voices. In the actual getting together again after so much turmoil of thought and expectation, they stood facing each other almost vaguely, there at the dusty, deserted side of the store. From the other side came the sound of music, a wild strain, just on the edge of breaking over; a sad and haunting thing that went to the heart.

“I had to see you.”

“I know.”

“I got to thinkin’,” he said. “It’s a day of merrymakin’. Everybody’s feelin’ mutual, and will, likely, so long as the day lasts. We could have the day—”

Talking was a wonderful thing, then. There was rest in it. Even like this, for a moment together, at the side of the crowd; the crowd busy with itself. They admitted in strange jabs of depth, with long helpless pauses between because there was so much to say there never would be time for—that there would be no peace in this for them. But maybe something that went deeper than peace. He said for him it was an excitement he had never known before, that had come to him unexpectedly in her, but that he’d take care of. And for her it meant a depth of living, a reality, that she had never had.

And talking to him, hearing the searching honesty of his very inarticulateness now when light words had been so

easy before—the threat of its getting to be a bad thing in their minds seemed to melt; or maybe it was only pushed back. But for the time again, she was glad he was in her life. It was a deeper, realer thing, that he was in it. And she might be the better, the more valuable, the more understanding for the ones she held dear because of it.

Neither of them said the word love. Almost it seemed they carefully avoided making any such tie. It was merely that they had chanced to come together; two people come together naturally, not to take their time together to keep.

The haunting strain had stopped, and there started up the whing-whang abandon of a dance tune. A caller began a bellowing singsong to it, summoning partners to take their places. There was the hum of people. Little Randall came trudging out from the cornfield. At sight of his sister and a stranger standing, just standing looking at each other, he came on warily. He stopped by Roseanna pointedly.

"I thought you were in such an all fired hurry to get back to the doin's."

Roseanna put an arm about his shoulders and drew her brother to her. She smiled at him, glad now he had come along today. She was proud of him.

"This is my brother Randall," she introduced. She felt an eagerness that they should know each other—a pride in both of them.

And for all he had said about not wanting to hear about her brothers, Jonse was regarding the boy now with a bright, sober intentness. "Howdy," he said.

"This is Jonse Hatfield, Little Randall."

The boy jerked free. "Get goin', Roseanna!" he said harshly.

"It's all right," she assured him gently. "We're only talkin'."

The boy stared at her, at her turning back to the man beside her, with that light that came to her face when she talked, but just looking at him.

"Why you're not sayin' a word!"

"It's all right, Little Randall—" she said it again, and started with Jonse, around the store.

Her brother followed, his voice rising, cracking incongruously with his fury. "Roseanna McCoy! Keep away from him, I tell you!" He was crying now, in his fury and his fear, screaming after them, as they rounded the corner of the store, into the crowd. "Goddamned-sonofabitch Hatfield!"

Roseanna flung about, angry and aghast at the child's blurting out something he didn't know anything about. Jonse, too, wheeled. But before either of them could bring words, it got strange behind them, in the rally field. Somewhere a fiddle note broke off, as though a string had snapped suddenly. The caller's voice, like the fiddle note, stopped short. The strangeness and the stillness crawled into her.

In a daze, she turned to face a silent crowd. So did Jonse, quickly.

In that charged atmosphere, as though in the unnatural brightness before a storm, Roseanna saw the eyes focused their way. She saw Tolbert's eyes flash. Some of the McCoy's, who had been lolling comfortably on the grass, loose and inert, with a swift light movement were on their feet. Immediately, as in a body, men she did not know were on theirs, with a great strapping dark man as their center.

In the clarity of terror, she knew him for Ellison Hatfield, Devil Anse's brother. There flashed through her mind the account she had heard of him, from Sam McCoy. The blood had rushed to her hot-headed cousin's face in infuriated frustration, as he'd told it. After the Racoon Hollow affair, Sam had come upon Bill Staton, the man who had given evidence against Old Randall at the trial. Bill had been in the woods, hunting, and Sam had ambushed him. But Sam's shot had been a little off, and only blown Bill's rifle from his shoulder. Sam had rushed at him with his own gun clubbed, to bash Bill's brains. But Ellison, whom Sam had not known was hunting with Bill, unexpectedly had jumped from the brush between them. Sheltered by Ellison, Staton had drawn a pistol, but the big Hatfield had knocked it down. "There'll be no shootin'! That was a fair trial, and that's the end of it."

Now Roseanna saw Sam's red face in the crowd, his mouth open to an unexpected smile; his hands hanging ready at his side.

Before her dazed eyes, the rally crowd, that a moment before had been a jovial jumble, now by some diabolical trick stood in two sharply divided factions. The Hatfields, with Ellison at their head, lined one side of the field, and the McCoy's the other. Tolbert's revolver was quick in his hand. Seeing that, the other McCoy's scattered for their guns, stacked against the oak tree.

Frightened women gathered up their least ones, and scurried for the shelter of the store.

Each side now stood facing the other, facing each other from the blood, it seemed, not even looking toward the two people who had caused this tension. It was as a red cloth, waved to one side of a bull, so inflames and fascinates it the

animal does not think to look to the real cause; to the person behind it. Like two armies, the two sides stood with strained faces, eyes darting from one side to the other.

Preacher Dyke, the big black Bible he always carried as his only weapon, weighing down his coat pocket, stood regarding the scene with a sorrow that could not be mistaken.

For a second Roseanna stood frozen. That morning none of this had seemed real. It had seemed something that didn't happen. That morning it had seemed impossible that reasonable men should want to kill each other over so slight a thing as a wild hog. Yet fighting words screamed hysterically by just an excited boy had brought on this. And it was real. It could happen. She had been wrong. How wrong was in this silence of hard-faced men, the silence of her own heart. Her stomach griped with a fear that shot to her legs in a thousand needles, leaving her nerveless.

And then, she realized that Jonse was there. She felt him tighten beside her; felt the sureness of him there. And with that, she knew, without thought or worry—it was not a sudden knowledge, it was as though it always had been there; she just had been excited for an instant—that he would get them past this that loomed so menacingly ahead. She had a strange sense of riding with him on a fast horse, recklessly, with danger ahead; looking ahead and seeing it, but just seeing it, and then sinking back against him not thinking much about the thing ahead one way or the other; just riding with him, knowing he had the reins in his hands—

It was deadly still in that instant in the field. They had come to it. And as though he lashed his horse to meet and pass, he turned to her, smiling a little, steadily, and said clearly, so that all and every might hear,

“Will you dance with me, Roseanna?”

From the field came a sense of surprised uncertainty. They had forgotten the incident which had divided them, and now at Jonse's friendly question there was the letdown of groundless fury.

And back of Roseanna's glorying in what Jonse had dared, and done—she heard an inconsequent thing, his pride enough in her. He had asked her to dance before his own people, when before he had refused. She answered him gladly,

"I'd like to."

There came a shuffling in both ranks. The McCoys looked to Tolbert as their leader.

Flushed then, with the excitement of having ventured something together—a big venture—Roseanna went to Tolbert, running to him. She was too happy just to walk.

"Please, Tolbert?" she begged.

Her brother looked down at her with his inborn anger still in his black eyes. His anger shifted to her. For a second she thought he was going to slap her, slap some sense into her.

"It's just for the dancin'," she pleaded. "He only asked me to dance. And this is a merrymakin', Tolbert!"

Tolbert grew confused. But he was still angry with her.

"Well you shore chose a hell of a way to pick a Hatfield for a partner—comin' around a corner like that, Randall screamin'. I didn't know *what* was goin' on!" His eyes narrowed. "Just what did go on?" he asked, cold and hard.

"Nothin'," said Roseanna, all at once so weary of the whole struggle it almost didn't matter any more. Nevertheless she added, "There's nothin' the matter with Jonse

Hatfield, except his name." She looked straight at Tolbert, her eyes defiant and steady.

Tolbert wavered. "You come purt nigh causin' a war, Roseanna. What were you doin', countin' in your head to keep your mind busy while pa was tellin' you not to mix in with the Hatfields?" he demanded acidly.

"I know, Tolbert, I know. But all I want to do is dance with him!" And suddenly she was going to dance with Jonse Hatfield in spite of hell and high water. It seemed ridiculous that she should even have to ask that. But she remembered something Tolbert said once, that nobody ever got anything from him by throwing an edge in their voice. So, as though it were any one of the thousand things they teased each other about—instead of the one thing that mattered—she said, "Oh come on, Tolbert, you don't want to have all the fun today. You wouldn't want me to go home and tell pa he had a selfish son, would you?"

Tolbert grew scattered, his earnestness a little foolish before that lightmindedness. But he was still frustratedly mad, thinking all over again about what she had done. "How in the name of God's green world could you *do* a thing like that!"

She didn't know. It had been done suddenly.

Tolbert stood regarding her morosely. "We want this trouble stopped, Roseanna, not started up."

"I know—" She knew now about the feud between the two houses. She had had to see it to know. That urge to destroy or drive out the other could lie dormant only so long, it seemed—and then flare. The near spark of tragedy that had been struck just now, had not been for nothing with her.

"There'll be no trouble, Tolbert," she promised him that earnestly. And then finished, in so low a tone he had to bend to hear her. "It's just for today."

She appealed to Phamer, who moved up. "I like him, Phamer."

Her two brothers consulted silently. At the other side of the space the two factions had made between them, Ellison Hatfield was grounding the butt of his gun into the ground, deliberately, while Jonse pressed their cause with him. Now the big man looked over thoughtfully. He, too, was there representing the head of a clan; responsible. In the clear light of reason, now that instincts had cooled, if there was going to be trouble likely he, no more than Tolbert and Phamer, wanted it on his head. He looked across to Tolbert and nodded slowly. Jonse's eyes met Roseanna's in a quick exchange. Phamer, seeing it, turned and stared at Roseanna, straight and long. Then, his voice and his eyes warning bounds even while he let her go, he said, "Well watch him while you like him. And in case you forget," he added, "we'll be watchin' him, too."

"It's only for today," she assured them again, sadly.

Tolbert, too, had been studying her. "I'm goin' to get drunk," he announced. "And stay drunk for a week."

Uncle Dyke, who joined them, made a mild reproach, "That's an evil, Tolbert."

"Then I'm goin' to see what makes it evil."

Even Uncle Dyke smiled. The tension was broken. The two camps shuffled to a scattering and a mingling again. But they regarded each other still warily. The men who had taken their guns from the oak, stacked them up again with varying expressions of feeling about it. Some of them were disappointed.

"Hell," one man said to another, going by Roseanna. "I thought there for a minute there might be a little fun. I'm tired just settin' and drinkin'."

"I can think of worse ways to spend a day."

Sam McCoy was still trying to hold a muttering crowd around him. A hot head naturally, after the Racoon Hollow trouble nobody could touch him with a ten-foot pole without the pole catching fire. But red hots burn themselves out. And his supporters, seeing their leaders had decided to ignore the matter, began to fall away from him, leaving him standing all alone, with no one talking to him.

Roseanna, too, stood alone. She and Jonse had fought so sharply for this day, and they had won. But now there was that letdown after climax.

She stood feeling a great general depression, a loginess of body and spirit and mind. She wondered at it, and then wondered that she wasn't more depressed than she was, considering that what they had won was only a day together.

Bess came to her, and put an understanding hand on Roseanna's own, although her eyes were questioning, deeply troubled.

"It's just for today, Bess," Roseanna told her wearily. It seemed a phrase she had learned by heart—and she had learned it by heart!

"I know," said Bess. And the way she said it, Roseanna knew that Bess *did* know. Although her sister-in-law added, "But Old Randall won't know." And in simple truth, "He counts on you, Roseanna."

The music was starting up. The caller took up his sing-song summons back to the dance, louder now, as though

in determined assertion. The couples who had been dancing before they were interrupted took their places again. The merrymaking her father had decreed was going on—the lack of trouble going on—dependent on her doing her share, Bess had reminded her; not only for today, but for always.

It could never be. Too plainly now there was no chance for her to have in actuality the happiness for herself she knew more and more there could be. Once, before any of this had come about she had looked at the people around her, the people she loved, and thought, "Someday I'm going to run away." Run away to something bigger than they were, that called her. She hadn't known then what that something would be. The discovery of it had come unexpectedly. But it had come.

She knew now it had been in their eyes' first meeting. Even then, she realized now, there had been a feeling of challenge about him, and her quite simple surrender to him. It was as though she had thought, "Here is a man, strong and sure in body, with a clear searching mind." There was nothing groveling, or hysterical in her surrender. It was proud and with the simple dignity of equality.

She remembered the quiet courage and clarity with which he had brought pause to what could have been slaughter, a few moments ago. The essential need of her always had been freedom of spirit. But she'd had people around her strangely dependent upon her, so the only way she had known was to take them along with her toward that freedom. But now, the end of her search had come. She had found, never expecting it would come this way, that freedom of spirit was no more than being all the

woman she could be for a man she might have loved. No more than that. No more than that. No more than the impossible itself.

Here was one thing in which she could not take those dependent upon her with her. And because of that, she could not go on, herself. She knew now where her freedom lay—but she could not have it. To follow her own desires too plainly would cause trouble. Nor were they the whole of her desires; they were all tangled up with the lives of those others. It was simply that the trick now lay in having strength enough to turn her back on the thing that was herself; turn her back, once and for all, on freedom—on love, or at least the woman love for man. There were other kinds. She knew that better than most.

“Just for today,” she had promised, and at the end of the day she would turn back. So when she had come to the full point and weaving and wholeness of her life, come to what, unconsciously her whole life had yearned and climbed to—she would turn away; she would turn back.

Then, just as she was resigning herself, quietly, with no thought of life again, ever—there was Jonse’s voice, and life soared again.

“Are you all right?” His tone was anxious. His eyes searched hers, in concern.

And her eyes warmed, and her heart, at that thoughtfulness. “I’m fine. And you?”

“Fine,” he said briefly.

There was a pause. “I knew you’d pass that trouble back there, a while ago.”

He looked at her, oddly. And then he laughed softly, and looked away for an instant and said, “So you knew I’d pass it, did you?” Then he came back to her quickly.

"We have a whole day, Roseanna. What do you want to do?"

"Everything!" She was exultant now, extravagant. "Dance and talk and laugh, just like we were really together at a play party."

"If we really were at a play party likely I wouldn't see much of you. I'll lay to it men buzz around you like flies around a liquor keg."

"I can think of better ways to put it!"

He laughed a little, and then scanned the merrymakers gloomily. "Look across and smile at me every now and again, will you, to freshen me for the fray?"

Ordinarily she would have laughed. But she tensed. "We'll have to be careful, Jonse—"

The music was going faster. Too fast. There was a hard drive to it, with somehow not quite the right quality. And the dancing, when they started on their planned gaiety, had the same.

Usually, when she went to play parties, she forgot everything except the joy of the dancing itself. But today she never could tell how the touch of Jonse's hand, when they came together in a figure, was going to leave her. Sometimes when she'd be so battered and driven inwardly by the need for that feel of nearness—which he had said, back by the hemlock, they would not have here; and it was true; they did not—and they met in the center of the big ring that the caller ordered in a bellow, she would sashaway back feeling only quiet almost to indifference for the space of the next partners she danced with. But when, at the last of the figure, the caller whanged out, "Go back to your own true love"—she was not quiet any more. She was shaky. And then Jonse swung her home, impersonally, but

she knew he was thinking of her, thinking well of her to be dancing with her before his own people. And it sent her high and happy out of her evenness, and she whirled joyously with him. Where would it all lead, this thing so beyond her control? At the moment she was too floatingly happy to try to figure it out, or to steer it herself.

In excitement again then, they waited for the next dance.

Still, the next dance did not quite come off, either. She doubted then if any of them would, all day.

And when that one was over, and they hesitated uncertainly in the lull after Big Willie's fiddle had scraped out the last tune of it, and the caller was mopping his face—he had worked too—Roseanna felt all the important things between them were going by untouched on. They had to be, for care. She could feel Tolbert's and Phamer's eyes on them all the time. She had not even dared meet Jonse's directly, even as they would come face to face in a figure. She was driven again.

It was a devastating need, destroying all thought of anything else. She could not think of anything except how even to talk to him for a little while again. But the need for care was great, and the hindrances so many! The incessant eyes of Tolbert and Phamer were on their every move and there was a carefully inexpressive attention to their dancing, from others. They danced one more time, only to make her know more and more how necessary it was for her to cut him out of her life, if her life and that of others, as it had been, was to survive. She was glad when the dancing was over finally and Jonse, evidently feeling too the uselessness of all of it, went to join his own people. She started to join hers, but she was only tired.

The lulling depression was on her again, the depression

of having no driving force, no glory about picking up her old life and going on. But she saw Little Randall sitting on the store steps, all by himself, whittling. She went over and sat beside him. His long red mouth tightened, not speaking to her, his eyes black.

"I'm glad you come today, Little Randall." She felt gentle with him, and wanted to make up for what she had said at home about little brothers not tagging around. As for his having attracted the attention of everybody to Jonse and her—that would have come anyway, one way or another.

He made no answer for a moment. Then he blurted it out. "And I wasn't havin' such a bad time myself—till you cut loose."

Roseanna said nothing. There was nothing to say. She had spoiled Little Randall's day. She thought of another time they had quarreled, not really, just a tiff over something or other. She remembered how her father, as they had stood across the room glaring at each other, had looked up from the fire where he was greasing his boots. "Little Randall," he had said, "take three steps forward." Glowering, but obeying, Little Randall had done it. "Roseanna," Old Randall had said, "take three steps forward." Wondering, so had she. It had brought them to the small center of a rag rug in the middle of the floor. "Now shake hands," their father had told them. Her brother and she had grinned at each other then, a little sheepishly, and shaken hands. "It's a mixed up world," her father told them soberly. "That's why we've got to keep things straight among ourselves."

How right he was, she knew now by the hurting of her heart. She got up slowly, and walked away.

Thad was over by the hitching rail, at the road, untying his horse. It took all the courage she had to walk over to him, but they had been too good friends always not to be outright now. But she didn't have to be—Thad knew, she could tell, as he turned toward her. Bess had known too, and Phamer. That was why Tolbert was getting drunk; why even Little Randall sat whistling alone. The people who knew her, and loved her, could tell.

"You goin', Thad?" she said, helplessly.

"You told me you'd give me your answer today, Roseanna—and you have."

"It isn't that Jonse and I will ever—" she began, and Thad looked into her eyes, and smiled, almost compassionately.

It was a strange feeling of sadness that came, then, of not being able to return the love of a devoted and faithful man. It was a sadness of the mind, without emotion. And yet she could have wept bitterly with sadness, but the tears seemed coming from an empty heart. It was Thad's sweet acceptance of defeat almost more than anything that made her sad about him.

"I'm such a fool, Roseanna, that I'll go on loving you anyway, whatever you do. And I'll do anything in the world for you."

She threw herself into his arms, weeping then, with that sadness. "I don't want you to do anything for me, Thad, except to be happy."

"That's funny—because that's what I want you to do for me—be happy."

A strange sadness.

But a difference came in the day—the day with the

shadows of evening coming on now, when she wandered over toward the women, busy with supper things. She went hesitant. But she could see Jonse still over with the men, and it was as well for a while that they kept apart. At first she stood around awkwardly, not knowing what to do, not even sure whether or not she was welcome among the women, after what had happened.

"How you, Aunt Het?" she ventured, to a big boned woman with a healthy ruddiness of nozzle and jowls, who was older than she looked; it showed in the wasted thinness of her legs under her skirts, and in her narrowed shoulders. The girls Roseanna's own age, whom naturally at any other affair she would have been with, were loitering with their beaux, or talking secrets, here and there around the field. But subconsciously she was seeking out some older person now, who would know all the terrible things that could happen to people, and understand. To her surprise, the older woman answered her heartily, good humoredly.

"Oh, about like common, Roseanna. Too much work."

A thirtyish woman moved into the conversation. While Roseanna had stood back, she had been talking intently, with grimaces, and drinking one cup after another of a sweet blackberry cordial somebody had brought. Now she came bringing a small crockery jar, with both hands. She walked with a strange shuffle and looked better carrying something in front of her because of her protruding stomach. She had some strange ailment. She set the crock down, and put in,

"Het ought to be glad she's got health *to* work, shouldn't she, Roseanna?"

"Be nice to be healthy and happy, too," retorted Het, and winked at Roseanna.

The other poured out a fresh cup of cordial and swallowed gustily, to get at the blackberry in the bottom, without comment. But it was a companionable lack of comment.

It began to dawn on Roseanna that instead of holding it against her that she had almost endangered the peace of their households, and possibly their lives—they were welcoming her. That rather she had made that peace a surer thing, at least for the time. After all, then, the sight of Old Randall's daughter and Devil Anse's son dancing together, friends, had been a thing to see. She thought of the wile of gaiety she had used, to get to do that. She knew the bitter force of it, suddenly, as it had turned against her. That had not been a gay dance.

Still, the thought of Jonse came like a swell of music in her heart, and in the fullness of it she offered eagerly. "Couldn't I help you spread those biscuits, Mrs. Winters?"

Mrs. Winters was a little old gabbler; left alone in a careless house in town after her husband had died. Her hair was straggling out from under her hat. Most women, now and then, put a hand up to see how their hair is doing. But she didn't bother.

"You sure could," she said, to the offer of help. "I'm about wore out, myself." She moved over, and Roseanna sat down beside her, and started spreading cold biscuits with slabs of apple butter she dug out of the crockery jar. It was that easy. Mrs. Winters gabbled on while they worked together.

"You know, I miss that dear boy," she confided, of the dead husband. "I never knowed how much he did for me. Now today I had to go by the store to pay my own bill, and wind the clock before I left. I never knowed the hardships that little man saved me from."

Roseanna had known Mr. Winters a little, more from the laughing talk that went around about him. A patient little man. Once his wife had wanted to go to the county seat at Pikeville right after breakfast, and told him to hitch up and wait for her. He got in, smoked his pipe, and waited. At noon he went in and ate dinner and came back to the wagon and sat down. About milking time Mrs. Winters sallied out and away they had gone.

"Course you miss him," Roseanna said.

"Seems like I can't settle down, now he's gone. Last night I just roamed, never got home till midnight. Went to sleep in front of the fire, woke up about daylight and la, I had part of my clothes off and still had my hat on! Couldn't make up my mind whether to take off my hat and go to bed, or whether to put on the rest of my clothes and go out again."

Roseanna laughed, and looked at the hat. By the looks of it, it had been left on from that time to this. It was a perfectly terrible black one, which by now had sidled down so far over one eye that Mrs. Winters would have to be careful how she walked—she was apt to run into somebody.

A thin man, in overalls, with an expressionless face came up and helped himself silently to a piece of pie.

Mrs. Winters went right on chattering, throwing in an explanation of his presence like a salt sprinkling. "He's Amos," she said, waving a vague hand to the man phlegmatically eating pie. "Come by as a tramp to our place for a plate of food and stayed thirty years. We never did find out what his last name was. He don't talk. Today he came back. Never thought a blessed thing in the world about his comin' back, but I'm glad to have anybody with winter comin' on and the kind of weather we'll be havin'. Never

known how I'd miss that little man. Have yourself another piece of pie, Amos."

"Mrs. Winters," said Amos very distinctly, "I don't want no more mince pie because it is moldy."

Mrs. Winters' mouth dropped wide open. It stayed open, while he went silently away.

"That's the longest bit of talkin' to me," she told Roseanna in awe, "he ever done."

Roseanna could have hugged him. Those were Cousin Zinny's pies! She suddenly wanted to tell Jonse about Cousin Zinny. Yet this was not being an empty interval without him. The thought of him, like a presence, opened up a richness she might otherwise not have been aware of.

She found a comfort in mixing in with women, in small ways without thought, helping get the supper ready; and she found a real enjoyment in the trivial conversation. She liked people, and would have them like her. But always before, when she would be in a crowd, she was never a part of it. That was partly because she was Old Randall's daughter, which set her apart. It was a little from scorn of it, and a good deal from shyness. It was only when some spark struck between her and some few people in a crowd that she really knew them; and when that happened they got along very well. "We get along," Jonse had said.

She caught his eyes, across the crowd, and they were soberly bright. She fell in with the talk going on around her then. She heard that the juice of cut beets was good for a child with whooping cough; a woman was worried about her one hog with the cholera; another's husband had been aspittin' and aspattin' at her till she had just flown into him. Small talk, for the most part. But now and then there were enlivening glimpses, like a door opening and shutting

quickly, but open long enough to know how little she knew of how other people lived. She looked at them with new interest. Sometimes a reality was struck that was good and satisfying. Mostly she listened, but now and then came in. And it was a comradely feeling that they paid as much, and no more, attention to what she said than they did to anyone else. She was *of* them.

A new half hour, easy half hour, almost happy again—and Jonse was in all of it, in a place he seemed to have come to be, in the center. Just there, the knowledge not hurting in this brief cessation from storm, scarcely felt, except for the instinctive turn of every thought to share the newness, the ease, the happiness.

When she had a great platter of biscuits and apple butter spread, Roseanna got up, and came upon the woman she had passed on her way to the spring, who had been talking about canning beans. Now she was telling about some kind of plant she had at home in a lard can.

“What kind of plant is it?” Roseanna asked her—not so much in interest, as in a kind of remorse now for the way she had felt about the woman’s blankness earlier.

At Roseanna’s overture the woman smiled, cautiously, but as though she were glad to.

“It’s a night bloomin’ cereus.”

“I’ve never seen one, that I know of,” Roseanna told her.

At that she really brightened. “Then you ought to come with me tonight and see mine—” She lived at the far end of a hollow from which she seldom went and where people seldom came. It was a regular shut-in, a sink hole; and after a while that feeling would get into the blood. “I’m leavin’ d’reckly,” she grew excited at the thought of it, “because

folks will be comin' tonight to see it. It don't bloom often, and then not for long—but it don't need to, it's that purty. Last night it bloomed for the first time. It started just past nightfall. We got it goin' around that it was bloomin', and put it out on the doorstone, and fixed a lantern up close so's folks could see it. La, I 'low close onto twenty come in last night, just to see my posie."

Roseanna looked at the drab apathetic woman whom she had thought so dull, and could see her blooming with her flower—the proud and gracious hostess. It was all Roseanna could do to keep from being taken then and there to go see it herself.

Everybody, she decided, had something they got a light in their eye about, or that troubled them, that was real to them—and the things that were real to people were so simple, once you knew. Strange, how far down in herself she'd had to go to find that out. She felt quite differently about people, than she had when she had left the field in scorn—quite differently about the dull ordinariness of their faces that would go on repeating themselves— She stayed on awhile, about the table, feeling the reaches of friendliness, warm and warming.

Men, hungry after drinking, began to wander over for supper. Phamer was among the first. With some anxiety Roseanna watched his approach, sure that Phamer would see Jonse's growing importance to her. It surely must have shown that Jonse was in all her inward life. But Phamer was talking to a man about his wagon.

"Must be there's an axle bent. I hit a hell of a rock up the road and it's squeaked ever since. And I've greased it twice."

"An axle is a hard thing," the other told him, studying on it. "It'll take a lot, but when somethin' hits just right, it'll snap."

Roseanna stopped, in the middle of the plate she was filling, and then went on, slowly. But when she handed it to Phamer, he still was completely engrossed in the matter of wagons. He merely said to his friend, "This one didn't snap. But it sure bent." But somehow his abstraction included her. She smiled at him, in relief.

Little Randall came up, standing back, until she noticed him. He was always starved to death. At his coming to her, instead of to someone else, she suddenly could have cried, with gladness, although she only said, casually,

"You ready to eat supper?"

"I might manage to choke down a little somethin'," he granted.

Neither of them, by word or action, said anything of what had been. But when she handed him his plate, there was a queer shyness in his black eyes. He dug into his pants pocket and brought out something he thrust in her hand. It was a little tintype, evidently taken while she had been at the spring with Jonse. She laughed a little when she looked at it—Tolbert and Phamer standing so stiff, and Bess sitting so prim with the baby. Little Randall had been caught with his eyes and his mouth open. The film had blurred right there, and he looked startled, like something out of a storm. She looked up. He was turning back, with his heaping plate, a few feet away, to smile at her. He was a good little boy! She never had loved him so much as she did at that moment.

She dropped the picture in a deep seam pocket of her dress skirt, and stood smiling at him, the smiling deepening

and dreaming at the way this affair with Jonse, in ways she was learning all the time, was not making the rest of her life mean less, but rather, giving it more to mean.

"You ever get that look in your eyes over anybody else except Little Randall?" somebody said.

Roseanna turned to Paris McCoy standing beside her. "Howdy, Paris."

Paris was a rascal, and took frank delight in his reputation, recounting his deviltries as though they were the biggest jokes in the world. Roseanna suspected the most of his tales of laying up with women of nights, and dropping out their back windows just as their men came in the front door, was mostly tall talk. But he was fun to dance and laugh and talk with.

She picked up a piece of maple sugar candy from his plate.

"Hey," he protested, as she took a bite, "I had to fight for that. I was savin' it."

"Were you?" Roseanna said, a little contritely, but not too contritely—why should she, after she'd already started in on it. "Good," she told him cheerfully, of his candy.

Paris got a strange, almost wistful look in his eyes. "You ever find out who sent you that honey, Roseanna?"

The gift had been something that had puzzled her, too. She had found it on her window sill one morning, without explanation.

"I never did," she told him. "And I've thought till my head hurts."

"Was the honey good?"

"The best I ever tasted," she said, honestly. "Light in color, and the same flavor."

He laughed. When Paris laughed you'd think, "I wish

he'd do that again! I'd like to hear it!" But hearing it this time, Roseanna hazarded, in astonishment—this had never crossed her mind.

"*You* brought that honey!"

"Me?" He hooted the idea. "Did you ever know me to do a damn fool thing like that, give a gal a present and not get credit?"

Roseanna laughed, "It doesn't sound like you," she agreed.

"Here, I'll lift that kettle for you."

"You don't need to."

"Only a damned fool'd do it," he grinned. And then he moved near her. "How about you and me eatin' supper together, Roseanna?"

"Paris, I—have to see somebody—" And she hurried as fast as she could to the spruce tree, to Jonse, to see him; she needed to be sure he was there. She felt all at once frightened, and somehow desolate.

She wangled her way through the crowd of men, pretending to look for Phamer, knowing very well he was right where she had left him, talking about his wagon. When the jug starts, the world gets small, and all the men, by now, both sides, under the expansiveness of the corn liquor, seemed to love each other like brothers. Even Ellison Hatfield and Tolbert appeared to be getting along.

She looked at Ellison curiously, his great cheekbones jutting out from his raw boned face. He was a big boned man with a hulk to go with it. A loud bluff man, whose good nature evidently came from good feeding, and now from good drinking. He was only Devil Anse's younger brother trying to act like the head of the clan for the day, working at it, and not doing badly. If there actually had

been trouble a while ago, he would have given a good account of himself. Roseanna shuddered; too good.

But since good humor had turned out to be the order of the day, he was going around breaking into conversations with some heavy joke which he accompanied with his own stomachy laugh and a jab with his elbow in the nearest rib. He was jabbing Tolbert, and Tolbert grinned, probably for responsible reasons of his own that he was sticking to doggedly, although hazily by now. Obviously he was making good his morose intention of getting drunk. He still was on his feet however. He lurched toward a jug hoping to make it, and did.

"Only trouble with this here doin's," Ellison was telling him jovially, "is that there's only *one* party of candidates to vote for," of the single line up of jugs.

Likely it was a joke he had made seven times before that afternoon, but he made it again as though it were the first time, and damned good.

"Eh, Mounts?" he prompted, as Roseanna went past. The man named Mounts blinked. He seemed about two stories behind, with more mind to other things. His pale eyes were roaming the drink stupored faces and weaponless hands of the McCoys. Roseanna did not like this man. She felt an aversion just at sight of him, and his slow witted face was brutal, with the whites of his eyes the bad white of poison ivy berries.

She looked harder for Jonse. He was not there. Not seeing him, and hating to ask, she wandered over to the fire, where the younger crowd were gathered. She was pulled into the circle by Mary Stafford, the girl Tolbert had planned to see today. At the moment Mary was telling about how she was going to tone Tolbert down when she

got him in hand; tossing her head and throwing in some irrelevant and irreverent comment, and laughing at the same time. The bouncing lot of life and impishness she put into it was carrying it to engrossing heights, and entertaining to everyone except Roseanna.

Roseanna only half heard. She was standing with her back to the fire, and kept listening to the footsteps on the flat rock beside it, as young people brought their plates to eat together. She waited, and listened; listened to dozens of those sounds of steps coming—and then, her heart started up within her, because she heard *his* steps. She knew they were his, out of the crowd, knew it before she saw him, and the sound of their coming gave her joy.

Little things she was finding out about him.

And sitting eating together then, she knew why she had been frightened, and had felt desolate at the thought of eating supper with Paris. It was because she should not be having supper with another man. If she couldn't have supper with Jonse, she didn't want to have it with anyone.

Everybody now seemed to accept Roseanna McCoy and Jonse Hatfield's pairing off for the holiday, without thinking much more about it. But they thought about it. They ate little as they sat together, and that quickly. Often Jonse would stop, abruptly, to turn to look at her.

"I can feel you against me," he said once.

She knew—she was weak inside with it; she felt loose, as though she were giving way. To steady herself she caught at ordinary things, like the coffee cup on the grass beside her, her hand trembling.

People kept passing, and repassing, some of them stopping

with some convivial comment, which one or the other of them would have to return.

"All these people in the world," Jonse complained. "The Lord should have known I'd have been satisfied with just you and not cluttered the place up so."

And yet, the interruptions of people were worth a great deal, just the way it let them come back to themselves again. Once a man with a big nose, and a wife who had all the smugness of the uninformed, stopped to talk.

"You weren't very nice to 'em," Roesanna observed, when they had gone.

Jonse grinned guiltily and said defensively, "Well I always feel a great big load come down on me whenever they're around, and I just sit and wait for somebody to move it."

Roseanna was amused. "You acted it! Who are they?"

"Some of my kin," he said glumly, "who live on this side the river."

Roseanna was delighted to be included in this tearing down of family. "Which one don't you like most," she prodded, "him or her?"

"Him, I reckon," he said morosely. "Because I have to see more of him. He breathes through his mouth and talks through his nose and has the sorriest collection of jokes I ever had to spend an evenin' with. It made me so damned mad to run into him today!"

"But it isn't his fault you're on his side of the river," Roseanna laughed at his annoyance, liking it.

"No, but he didn't have to be there talkin' an arm off that peddler when I was in a hurry."

"Is that where you were? I wondered."

Abram, who led the singing at the church, and his

brother Enos came by just then. Roseanna had never known Abram to drink, but he was drinking today. The tall quiet man suddenly got a strangling look on his face, clapped a thin hand wildly to his mouth and headed hastily for the brush. His brother shook his head at Roseanna and Jonse, and said, as a kind of impersonal observation,

“He’s been doin’ that all evenin’.”

The young people smiled, faintly, and waited to be alone again. The brother stood patient. “He ought to get drunk once a week,” he commented, again in general. “He’d get along good, then.” But when Abram came back, looking wan, he amended judiciously,

“Abram, if you’re goin’ to keep on practicin’, practice on that rot gut I got out in the saddle. No use wastin’ good lickker.”

“All right. How do, Miss Roseanna,” Abram said miserably, just then seeing her. “I couldn’t feel no worse’n I do.” He trailed his brother toward the pawpaw thicket at the river bank where the horses were hitched. Abram never had believed in drinking, and likely he’d be stronger of that same opinion in the morning.

Jonse had been drinking, too. But what he was stayed the same through it. There seemed continually new things to find out about him.

When it was Uncle Dyke who came up to them, they both rose to their feet for the preacher.

“How you, Uncle Dyke? This is Jonse Hatfield,” she introduced.

Uncle Dyke held out his hand to Jonse. “I’ve knowed your father, from way back. He was Captain to me in the Home Guards, back in the Civil War. But we’ve not met in a good little while.” The preacher’s eyes twinkled. “We

don't seem to get around to the same places." Then he said, sincerely, "I'd love to see him again, though. You tell him I'm laying out to get up his way, afore the fall rains start."

"You do that," Jonse told him. "He'll be proud to see you."

Roseanna listened, pleased. Uncle Dyke and she were good friends, and had been, as long as she could remember. He wasn't a ranter, like some of the traveling preachers who rode through occasionally. He lived among his people, worked the same kind of rocky fields, knew the small intensities and big, or the lack of anything, that made up their lives six days a week. Then on Sundays, he gave them a touch of something grand. Uncle Dyke was clever turned, poring over the scriptures nights after his day's work was done, his thin fingers lining the words he conned by rote. Magnificent words, that made something inside a body stand up, and the very trees outside the little church window holes seemed to still and listen when he said them.

But Roseanna always had watched him, as much as she had listened. He was just an ordinary sized man, looking about like common, with thin hands. But they were hands you remembered. The right one, as he used it when he preached, was like a delicate instrument of high strung tension; now the first thin finger ramming out the danger of damnation, now the whole hand lifted to soften down fear, and then beckoning to bring in gently a swell of the soul thrilling grandeur of everlasting mercy—but toning it down, still there but held back. And at the end his left hand would come in to summon his people for a last hymn; like a great man he would bring them to their feet.

But Uncle Dyke could talk of common things, too, and now, although the three of them stood in a group, it was

mostly the two men who talked. Man talk: a little politics, an engrossment with hunting. And the way Uncle Dyke listened to what Jonse said, she could see even though he was talking to a younger man he held Jonse's opinion of some account, worth listening to. And when he presented his own, it was as though to someone who would know what he was talking about.

When he had gone, Jonse said, soberly, "Nice old fellow."

And this sharing of a mutual friend seemed to plunge her into a real depth of liking and new pride in Jonse. It had nothing to do with lovmaking, and yet it added one more thing. And because of it, when Uncle Dyke had moved on, she felt a conscious joy as Jonse moved nearer her. She had never known before such pure joy at the anticipation of anyone's touch.

Jonse said, "I've never known an hour like this in my life—"

An excitement between them that stayed. But they stood not quite touching, and she said, of what she had been thinking,

"People like you. You have a way of getting along with them."

There was a casual warmth of the eyes as he said, "That's because I'm with you, and tryin' for you. I'm really shy as somethin' out of a woods."

She was surprised to hear that, after this day, when she thought she was beginning to know him very well.

"You don't act so," she wondered. "You act sure—and hard."

"That's why. I jump hard, because I'm scared."

Roseanna smiled a little, knowing that; feeling tender

toward him—and what a wide arc the mind swings—almost protective. And suddenly, impulsively irrelevant to the moment, she said,

“Jonse, I’ll love you forever for bein’ so good that—time back in the sawmill.”

It was the first time either of them had said the word love, and Roseanna said it lightly, happily, gratefully. But Jonse stopped her quickly.

“Don’t say that, Roseanna!” He looked at her intently, that searching frown again between his eyes. I’m not sure I could make any woman happy, ever. I have to have something once, and then I’m through. And I wouldn’t want you to be hurt.”

She stood accepting his silencing of her. And she felt, too, somehow, they had the real strength of their love, if it were love, to prove yet. This had come out of richness, of a day lent to them, not out of poverty. A day lent to them in trust, and there was mind and conscience and experience to deal with. She felt they were older than they were. This was not the blind light of youth. Which made it more a matter of weighing one thing against another. And thought put weight to it, because thinking about it, they knew it was hopeless.

“Roseanna!” One of the women was calling to her, “Come see which of these baskets is yours.”

What difference did it make, she almost retorted. And then, she saw Phamer, his eyes on her while she stood with Jonse. They were counting on her. She went over and sorted through the baskets, and found hers and gave it to Bess to take home in the wagon.

“You about ready to go, Roseanna?” asked Bess quietly.

“D’reckly, Bess. D’reckly—” she said, distracted.

She almost bumped into her Cousin Zinny in her hurry back to Jonse. The old woman gave her hack of a cough, that had a furtive excitement in it, and scurried on. Roseanna went on with an uncomfortable feeling of distrust. She thought she had found today that it was almost impossible to know people and not like them. But there were a few exceptions. For the life of her, she couldn't think of anything good about Zinny—except that she had been the cause of her knowing Jonse. But actually to try to like her, was like trying to like a rat. People with little minds like Zinny's were dangerous—and soul aggravating. A petty mind was as dangerous and devastating a thing as there was. But it kept within the letter of the rule. The thought came with sudden, ironical foreboding. She had not wanted Zinny to touch her brief encounter with Jonse before; less now. The old woman had taken the spark out of the lives of everybody in her own family, and Roseanna didn't feel to have her branching out into *her* affairs. She hurried her step.

Jonse had a wild look in his eye when she got to him, and said, "Don't ever leave me alone like that again!"

"What's the matter?"

"That cousin of yours! She come spraddle footin' over and camped herself—all that talk, and so damned close even though I kept movin' back I got batty eyed."

Roseanna chuckled. A better moment was starting. Having Jonse to laugh with about Zinny took the weight off. "What did she talk about?"

"Lord knows," he said gloomily.

"I don't like her, either," she told him.

They stood looking at each other then. A twisted, impatient smile came to Jonse's mouth. "We'd make a good

pair," he said. "We both hate the same people." Then he reached abruptly into his shirt pocket. "Here, I got somethin' for you, not much, just a little somethin'," he said. "I've been tryin' to give it to you for the last hour—but time goes so fast—"

Roseanna felt the tears spring at his having even thought of a present, and because time went so fast—

The sun was going down like a fire at one corner of the store, throwing its last full blaze upon them. On the other side the camp fire had been built up, against night coming.

They stood formally apart, in the full light of both, and Roseanna stood with the present in her hands, looking down at it. Then she looked up at Jonse, the tears really in her eyes, and down again at her present. It was a small band of gold, of slender scrolled leaves, each leaf twined in the next to make a ring. It was so small and right and lovely in itself, and standing for so many things about them she had not known there would be—lovely, warm good things connected with love but not lovemaking—

"Is it all right?" he asked her anxiously.

"It's the prettiest thing I've ever had in all my life," she whispered. "And I'll keep it forever—" Then she felt suddenly uncaring, heedless of Tolbert's or anybody else's eyes on them. "You put it on for me, Jonse."

He put it on, on the little finger of her left hand. She lifted her hand to see it there—the loveliness of it, the rare sweet beauty of it that would grow with the years of loving it. Her joy in it! She looked at it again and again.

The music was starting up, for the last dance before the merrymaking broke up.

"I wish we could dance. I want to say to everybody, 'Look what Jonse gave me!'"

Jonse started to say something, that changed to a brief, "Yeah. That would be a fine idea." Then hopelessly, "And I want to tell people you're mine. I want them to know."

He didn't tell them, any more than she showed them her ring.

"We've never said, 'I love you' to each other."

"No," Jonse said. And then very soberly, "That doesn't seem an easy thing to say, for us."

They could never acknowledge even this day. But if they could just settle down and accept it as it was, having it in their hearts like a good thing— When would this battering toward some peace between them stop?

They did not dance. They could not have gone through that farce. They sat off at one side together, just outside the firelight. Night was coming on, and the air was stirring sharp. Involuntarily Roseanna shivered. Jonse pulled off his coat quickly and put it around her. His face was unsmiling and stern. There was a fierceness to the hands making the coat sure about her shoulders, that weakened her with its goodness.

All round them there was laughing and talking and fiddle music, and the stupored coarseness of men finishing up the last of the liquor. Once a brawl started, that stopped, almost as soon as it began. All this was in some other place.

Bess came by, the baby asleep in her arms, and said anxiously, "We're goin' now, Roseanna. Best come with us."

"I'll wait for Tolbert," Roseanna said.

Bess glanced over toward the spruce. In the flame of the pine torch somebody had lighted, the shadows of men were thrown grotesquely big against the lighted up side of

the store. Little Randall was hanging around with some other boys, on the outskirts.

"Better ride with Randall," Bess suggested.

Roseanna nodded, scarcely hearing her, except that it meant the parting with Jonse. And she knew, suddenly, if she were never to see him again, there would be no point to anything—and that was strange, when all the rest of her life was so full. She looked down at her ring, and touched it.

Their last hour together, they talked; about little things and big things. They talked about his foresting ideas. And Roseanna could feel how thrilling it would be, the way he would come up through discouragements to be a power in the world of lumbering; thrilling the way other leaders in the field would be deferring to him. Jonse turned to her suddenly, curiously.

"That's what a wife-woman would be for, to start you out in the mornin' thinkin' you could be the biggest lumberman in the country. You wouldn't think so, along about midafternoon—but then you'd remember, and go to it again."

Roseanna caught her breath. It was the first time he had said wife-woman. "Let's pretend, Jonse," she whispered. "Let's pretend, just for a little while, how it would be."

"It wouldn't be much of a place for you. It's an out-way place, and just a shack. But I've been thinkin'. I figgered out a while ago how we could do. We could make two rooms of it, one where the fireplace is, and there'd be just about room enough in the other one for the bed. It wouldn't be much of a place, for a while," he told her anxiously.

"It'd be a wonderful place," she said softly.

"But we wouldn't have such a sorry place always."

His impatience made her laugh a little, "Do you reckon we're the kind who'd ever get rich?"

"I don't know, but we'd sure make a hell of a try at it."

Nor would it be a sorry place while they were trying it. She'd put curtains at the window, and have flower things growing outside. She'd like to do that, in a place of their own with the feel of them in it. And she'd be so glad to see him when he came in, like running into him all over again. And they'd sit down and eat supper, and afterward the day's tiredness and the things that had gone wrong would go, as they sat around the fire, talking, or not talking. And any time she wanted, when she went by, she could put a hand on his shoulder, just to know he was there, and he could reach out and touch her as she went by.

Sometimes they would have people in of an evening and the house would look so pretty, the lamplight soft and a kind of worn-to-comfort air of graciousness about it. "A pretty house!" people would say, and they would be proud of it, because of their lives together in it. Then when the others had gone they would have liked having them, but when the door was closed, they would be gladdest of all to come together again. They had found that out today.

And when they went to a play party, even though they had had a good time, the very air would be different, clearer, sweeter, when they turned in their own house yard; the stars brighter. And they would sit and talk the party over, whom they'd seen, and what they'd said, and what she and Jonse thought of this and that one; sitting longer than they should, they'd be sorry in the morning. But

those nights they'd have the best parties of all after the party was over.

And come a gloomy day, there'd be the rain outside, but the house inside would be warm.

They were just two people, in their dreaming, living the life of any two people, living it without drama or strain. Two people who could have been happy together in the little ways, and built up a good and satisfying thing together—if only they had a chance to try.

A sudden concern struck Roseanna. "Are you sure I'd be all right for you, Jonse? I'd want to be, more than anything."

"You're a sweet woman," he said, "who suits me."

The mountains on this side of Tug River and the ones across in West Virginia were falling together darkly, the same dark against a sky the color of nothing.

A silence fell. A silence to both of them being people enough to do what was right about this. The silence grew sober, both of them knowing it could never be, this happiness for them.

The dancing had stopped, and Big Willie was playing again that sad and haunting tune, so beautiful and so sad it seemed to have been made for them.

The future grew black as the night. Neither of them could look ahead to any way in which their being together, that was so natural and deeply right to them, could be justified. The quickness to it still was amazing. Even awhile ago she had thought, "Let's give ourselves time to think about this." But now they didn't need time to be sure. She knew it unexpectedly, as though she had just discovered it. Strange after spending a whole hour talking, dreaming impossible dreams—both of them saying so—

of how it would be if they were married. But now it came of knowing so many things. And so because of everything she had discovered, almost in surprise because everything had come so rushingly from so held back a building, she said it carefully, thoughtfully, and yet suddenly, too.

"I love you."

He looked at her, a long moment, and then got up and kicked a log that had fallen, back onto the fire, staring at the sparks that flew. Roseanna's eyes went straight ahead. There was a hotness to her very cheekbones, in a mixture of scorn and anger. She never had said, "I love you" to any man before in her life. And now when she did, he turned away. She got to her feet, and walked away from him, to a tree in the shadows and stared straight eyed at nothing. He turned.

"I'm afraid of you, Roseanna."

Afraid of her! The only man she ever had put herself out over and he was afraid of her. The scorn, of herself, of him, grew—and a despair.

He came to her. "I'm afraid of myself—of us. Haven't you known that all day?" he demanded, in astonishment.

She had not known that, exactly. She had been too lost in the confusion of herself. But now she knew that she had known, not in her mind, but in her being, that she would come to him. She stood glad in that recognition, and quiet, and highly happy, all at the same time, and with the ache of tears.

And in the presence of anyone who might have cared to notice, he gathered her swiftly, strongly, in his arms. They went without talking through the trees, toward the knoll at the back of the field. When they came to a fence,

he lifted her over, holding her a moment, and then they went on. They went through the shade of pines whose shadows were the deeper for the moonlight that fell between. She went in a clear sure happiness, beyond thought. It was more a sense of rightness that pervaded her. She had no sweeping train to her white dress, and only asters were in her hair, but she went with a light, sure joy, as on her wedding night.

They had said there would be no peace for them—but the peace, the flooding warmth and peace as they lay afterward in each other's arms.

And standing at the top of the knoll a moment, before they came back, as they were saying their good-by, he looked at her soberly.

"Awhile ago, you said something to me. Now I say it to you. I love you."

And there happened that thing she always had heard was supposed to happen; felt thinly because of the draining exhaustion of this whole overwrought day. But it came, a thrill that actually started in her heels and went all the way up her body. They went down the knoll, through the cold clear night with the stars in it, and tired as they both were, it was a wonderful night!

The parting came, at the tree at the back of the fire, where Roseanna had stood before. He stood pinning her against it, with his hands.

"Remember three things," he told her. "One—I love you. Two—I'll be there for you, if you ever need me. Three—it may be a year, two years, ten; I don't know how or when, but someday—" And then, looking at her as at something being taken away from him, he said, "I don't know what I'll ever do without you."

They reached for each other, clinging together. The goodness, the stanchness of someone is not what you think about until it gets called especially to your attention. When you loved somebody you just wanted them. That's about all there was to it. You wanted somebody you wanted, and you wanted them forever. And the ache, the tears, at thought of days without them—

"Roseanna?" It was Tolbert, calling for her heavily.

They stood desperate at the summons. Until swiftly, with one decisive, defiant movement, Jonse picked her up.

"I'm takin' you home, across the Tug."

He strode with her to his horse. Roseanna did not try to think. She only went by sense.

She sat in front of him, feeling his arms taut around her, on the reins. The horse was fleet and powerful, and magnificent as it crashed over the low watered rocks of the black Tug and pounded on across the other side. It seemed to be running away with them; they seemed being swept irresistibly onward, whether toward happiness or disaster she did not know. Only that they were being swept onward by some force stronger than they were. She knew they should try to pull in, that they should catch themselves up sternly, make this force take them back to where they had started toward that day; to have just this one day together, and no more. But none of the things she should have thought mattered, neither his people nor hers nor doom, so long as Jonse was guiding their way with his arms about her.

There was release in the flight—the relief of taking definite action, no matter what its outcome. But there was more; wholly more. It seemed something they had been thinking about for a long time, and it had to be done. And

once started, it went of itself, not them making it, and with such force and inward rush Roseanna could not struggle against it because before her always in it was the way it was meant to be, from the beginning.

It let them ride recklessly, half rising in the saddle together to take unexpected boulders that rose in the way; flattening instinctively under murderous branches that reached to throw them. The trail climbed up around one side of a mountain and where it started down, at the other, it swung to the edge with a thousand or so feet of moonlight below before they'd have hit the first tree-top. The horse miraculously kept its footing, its rhythm never faltering, and the motion of their bodies followed the motion of the horse. Roseanna had a sense of plunging, gloriously, without fear.

"I *knew* we'd ride well together!" Jonse leaned forward and shouted it, above the beat of the hoofs and the roar of the wind. Roseanna turned briefly, in an exultancy of her own, and caught the glint in his eyes, as though of triumphant discovery.

The big bay streaked through the moonlight, its black mane roached back by the wind. The wind was so sharp it hurt to breathe, and it cut and stung against their faces. It was a cold burn clear to the bone. And the sound it made in the trees all down and around and below them was like the whip of life. But they were started now, and nothing could stop them!

They rode hard, following the crest of a long ridge. At a fork in the trail, Jonse drew up. The horse could not keep this pace much longer, carrying double. Roseanna could feel its flanks wet against her legs. It stood with its head hanging tired while the riders sat drawn up to listen.

From someplace behind them came the yelp of a wolf, that subsided. They sat tense as it ceased. Its whine either could have been stopped by the scent of humans, or it could have snuffed out in its own satisfaction as the night rover dragged down its kill. From another direction came a long quavering, piercing wail, the cry of a panther, minored by distance. A great horned owl sent out its dismal hoot. An answering call came from an opposite hill, ending in a goblinlike sound like laughter.

Under any other circumstances, any one of these sounds would have struck dread to Roseanna's heart. But now they came as only the common noises of the night forests. There was no pounding of furious hoofs to break against those natural sounds, no speaking up of rifles. Even the wind now, since they had stopped rushing against it, was rustling in the trees around them at its own pace. They turned to each other slowly.

They had had so little time together, inadequate moments—never enough of them; even the things uppermost in their minds unsaid. They *had* been together though, enough of this day for the fact of it to have left its joy, and this need for more of it. And even out of what they had had, actually it had been cut up with people, and the feel of time closing in. But they had had two minutes, maybe three, afterward up on the knoll when they had held each other close, held not so much by each other as by a flooding warmth and peace—two minutes broken into by the realization that they must part. But two minutes that somehow grew to be all of it, as they sat looking at each other then in the moonlight.

There was a sense of pause; of suspension of everything except their aloneness, together. They sat looking at each

other not from a vacancy of mind, but a fullness. Roseanna could find no words.

But Jonse said, irrelevantly, in wonder, as though there were time now for wonder,

"You were so much mine, back yonder. It seemed so right we should be together—" his eyes grew searching, sober, wanting her to be sure about this.

But after all, it was very simple. She always had thought she was a simple person. But she seemed to have had to go a long way around to find it out. She just wanted to be happy with someone she loved. That fire she had felt all day was back in now, but still there, real and sure.

"We belong, Jonse." Jonse leaned down quickly, and kissed her. Then, with a deep sigh, he flung a hand toward hers, and she took it. It was a warm clasp for a moment, after abandonment and completion. He started the horse on, taking it down the slope, at a walk now, toward timber lying in soft dark in the valley below, like a shadow.

Roseanna turned for a last look back toward where Kentucky lay. It still was not long by miles, but in the moonlight those hills looked vague and far from her. Somewhere in them was a great old log house that had kept its walls around her, good kind walls, keeping the harshness of the world from her. Keeping the world from her. She supposed that still was where her duty should be. But here was where her life lay, her happiness.

She thought of the hard unyielding back of her father, which was the last she had seen of him. The disappointment she would cause him by this was something that would lie heaviest within herself, she knew. Yet, a hardening came of her own. He had had his chance at a way of life,

and chosen hatred as its center. Now it was only right and fair that she have a chance at hers.

And she was riding home Jonse's bride. Not always did mountain couples have big infairs. Oftener, when two people fell in love, they merely announced their union by moving in with one or another of their families, or by setting up housekeeping in a place of their own. Then, when it was convenient for a preacher to get up their way, he would say the words. "I'll be up that way afore the rains start," Uncle Dyke had said.

She still could not see ahead to how it would come out. She was just going along now, with the rhythm of each phase of it as it came.

As they entered the valley woods the breath of it rose illusively. It was that sour spicy one of all the woods she had ever known, but she tried this one out especially. This was Jonse's country, and hers now. There was the bruise of pine needles in it, and crumbling logs, the minty fragrance of teaberry, the faintly acid smell of growth—the plain strongness of dirt; all of it mixed in with something she could not call, something deeply living, of the earth.

Moonlight was lying lightly here, with the night showing through, making the woods quietly beautiful, but not too quiet. There was enough stir for the trees to move restively under their lay of light. The moon here was no one thing she could see, no round ball in one place, but a light that was back of the sky overhead, and under the dark thicknesses of shrub, and in the gray-old twist of laurel stalks. Small glistens of it were held separately in the dark gleam of leaf cups as they passed. In its light the trail they were following looked full and brown, asleep in its own richness.

There was such a mystery to this first sight of her new country, after the day's tenseness, she seemed scarcely able to take it in. Just as she felt scarcely able yet to encompass all the life there would be for them to fill in it; to grace, to calmly master—and with honor so that as they mastered it, they also honored it, for it was deserving of honor. She felt wondering, but following without doubt or question. It was a sober experience, yet there was a joy in it too; a rush up of it, like life rushing, a full rush up inside of her—a happy rush.

She felt rich inside; for all that had been, and as though she were standing on the threshold now, of proving. Perhaps it was false, it must be false, in the face of everything still against it. Nevertheless she had to sit suddenly close, out of the happiness of that moment.

"Cold?" Jonse wondered of the gesture.

She shook her head. "Are you?"

At her being close against him, and his finding it warm, he grinned. "I'm apt to get sunburned." So calmly, so ridiculously—and oh so wisely! Laughing was wonderful.

"We're so many things to each other, Jonse," she marveled. "How can two people be so many things?"

"Because we love each other," his answer a part of his kiss. "Are you sure that seat's comfortable enough for you? I ought to have fixed you a red velvet throne." He said it so teasingly, so nicely the inward tears were there, as well as her laughing.

"You have," she told him. She loved him so fiercely. She knew he could not help but be worried about what his father would say to his bringing home a McCoy as bride, but he was making it seem such a privilege.

The valley and its hills fingered out deviously. Jonse

knew which way to choose and they followed a creek to its head. Sometimes they splashed through the creek bed, but oftener they were on a narrow trail beside it. Jonse had said it was wild country, over here in West Virginia. He had been talking then about his mountaintop. But even here it was so, in the way the woods turned, and closed in quickly, letting them see only a little at a time ahead or behind them. And presently as they rode, all sense of anything before this was lost. It did not seem incongruous here, that Roseanna McCoy and Jonse Hatfield should be riding along together through the night.

Still, the uncertainty of the future persisted. It seemed important that every moment be full of every right thing they could make it—so that each moment done would be that. But she didn't know what to do toward that, except love him. And she said, so glad about it,

"I love you!"

"It's the wiser course," he said dryly. "I'd be meaner'n a bobcat to you if you didn't."

Roseanna laughed. "We have good times together, Jonse!"

"The best," he was agreeing gravely, of their good times. "And they're only beginnin'."

The horse was going along with its head down now, but at a strong, even stride that was covering distance. Roseanna leaned forward and stroked its smooth muscled neck.

"You'd think he'd be winded."

"Prince is tough as a goat," Jonse assured her. "He could go for a week and never draw breath, if he had to." Still he let him go at his own gait for a while, to give him rest.

They began to talk a little then, of inconsequent things. Presently Jonse wrapped the reins around one wrist and

started leisurely packing his pipe. Roseanna half turned to watch him, in the half light taking the pleasure she had come to, in his hands.

"You've nice hands."

"Handy things, too," he said, and got out a sulphur match.

She was delighted again by that dryness of remark.

"Let me light that for you," she offered.

She struck the big match on her shoe sole. It flared unexpectedly, like a torch, burning her finger. "Ow!"

Jonse was half exasperated, half amused; solicitous. "Want a daub of mud on it?"

"Oh no," she said. The burn bit in surprisingly, but in the ease that was coming between them it was nothing and she felt, all at once, lightminded about it. "Soon I'll have a frightful blister and in three days have blood poisoning like Pete Wiggim."

"Who's Pete Wiggim?" he asked.

"He carries the mail for Pike. Does it once a week."

"Still carryin' the mail?"

"Oh sure. The doctor cured him of fits."

"I thought you said he had blood poisonin'."

"He did. But the doctor over there only knows to cure fits. So he gave Pete somethin' to make him have fits and cured him." She laughed, remembering it.

Jonse looked at her, and smiled, "I like to hear you laugh, Roseanna. It sounds like wind through an oatfield, it's that light."

It pleased her, deeply, when he said things like that. It brought a beautiful unease like the one that comes with the swell of the grandeur of music, like their song Big Willie played. It was not so much what he said, but the way he

said it, out of the distillation of very much; that must be kept now, and all it could mean. She could not quite name it but it was there, and soberly. And to cover it she went on with nonsense.

"It's really Pete's face that's his trouble," she said. "It's all putty—no bone, just putt. He's all one color—a yellowish gray. You take a quick look at him," the memory of Pete quickened, picking up on its own nonsensical momentum, "and you think he's veiled in a burlap shroud. Then you look again," she gave a snap of her good hand's fingers, "and you can see the features. He always wears a gray shirt. He looks good in gray, his mother tells me."

Jonse laughed, and so did Roseanna then, outright. "He's so dumb! He tells me somethin', and then I repeat it, and he brightens and thinks *I* was the one who said it. 'That's right,' he says, pleased."

"You've a sweet mind," Jonse commented.

"I try to keep it that way," she told him, modestly.

He thrust the reins at her. "Your hand's better."

"Oh no it isn't," she denied, "I've just got used to the pain, that's all. But I'll suffer in silence."

"Oh hell!" Jonse drew up, and leaped down, and smacked a handful of cold damp creekside mud on the burn.

"That feels so good it hurts," she admitted. And presently, she told him in amazement, "The burn's all gone!"

"Of course," he said calmly, of his cure. "The only mistake I ever made was not seein' you sooner."

Roseanna nestled her head in a place she had found for it, against his shoulder.

"Roseanna," he said, a little helplessly, "you bewilder, befuddle, and becalm me."

What a gay, careless, easy living two people they could

be, if only they were let alone. Roseanna sat up, suddenly.

"People aren't goin' to like us much—for this."

He grew impatient at that. "What do we care if people don't like us? We like each other. And when we get up in that house of ours, we'll shut the door. We'll bolt it," he added; "lock the world out, and God help 'em."

Roseanna looked at him quickly. But there was only enough irony in the faint quirk of his mouth, and in his eyes' smile at her, enough of the experience of harassment and uncertainty, to make that house she had never seen sound more and more like their own private heaven. And at some time she did not know exactly, an illusion of that very sanctuary had risen around them, out of this interval.

For a space they went on with a comfortable lack of need for talk. Until presently Jonse commented, idly,

"Don't know why people always talk about the quiet of the woods. Noisy damned place. All kinds of things troupin' around."

Against the lift of the night winds, and the water sounds, Roseanna listened then for the things he did, and found an interest in them; the scurrying of small feet through last year's fallen leaves; the startled whirl of wings. From somewhere back in the hills there came the lament of a hound, baying at the moon. Once a fox blundered past through the brush, making almost as much noise as a man. From the distance came the bark of another fox; the hound gave other tongue, a wild bell-like note.

Yet for all the scurrying and prowling of night things, it *was* quiet in that woods. It was a quiet that seemed to come of them, rather than to them. What was it that had happened? They both wondered. For a while Roseanna had felt each of them had been putting up a front of happi-

ness, for the other, hiding the fear that lurked; enjoying every little thing with a sense that its holding time was brief. But it was not all front, as it was working out, because everything that happened, every way thoughts or moods went up or down—everything circled back to this way of keeping each other happy, each moment, each hour, as it came. And in itself, that had been one more thing they had found together.

But this quiet now was something they were not having to fool themselves, or each other, into. It was just naturally there. All the small hard knots Roseanna had been tied into all day at every thought of parting from him, had loosened. The tightness had gone from Jonse, too; she had felt it go. Even the whipped-up pitch of their first escape was giving way to a blessed relaxedness, with the peace of themselves seeping all through it, slowly and gratefully, like gentle rain into a cracked hard earth.

"These will be the times we live for," Jonse decided.

They were just two people then, like any other two people, at the end of the day, with the day's harassments smoothing out. A little bit of talking, a little bit of laughing, a little quiet—a fullness with living, peacefully, contentedly full. This would be the way their evenings would be in their own house. A refuge from everything else that went wrong, for one thing, and fun in itself for another. Whatever else would be the matter with the rest of the world, there would be no trouble behind their own front door; none, at least, that they couldn't take hold of and fix up together.

Roseanna turned in the saddle to put her head deeper, then, against Jonse's shoulder. There came warmth in the world, and the clean smell of wool and nothing more. It

was a quiet; a bone stillness, deeper almost than sleep. Jonse shifted the reins, carefully, to one hand, and with his fingers traced the way of her face, her throat. She looked up at him.

"How do you know to do the gentle things I've always thought I'd like?"

He smiled at her a little, soberly. "Why don't you sleep for a while?" he suggested.

"Would you mind?" A sifting drowsiness was coming all through her body.

"I'd like it," he said gravely.

"Wait," she sat up, and slipped out of the coat she still was wearing.

"I don't want that," he protested.

"I'll have part of it," she told him.

He shrugged into it, and she tucked the collar up. The air was thinning, as the night grew, and sharpening. "You've a strip of moonlight lying across you," she discovered.

"Take it off," he ordered. "I'm tired. I don't want the weight of it on me."

That made her laugh again, and Jonse looked at her—with something of that first bland bantering, but freer now, in their freedom with each other.

"I thought of you several times while we were first makin' off from that rally field," he announced.

"You did?"

"Times," he admitted, "I'd get busy with Prince, here, and forget about you. Then all at once it would hit me—the way you'd felt in my arms. You're a wild and wonderful and terrible thing," he told her, in awe, "and sweet and exciting and satisfying. And oh my golly, how pretty!"

He drew a deep, elaborate sigh, "You'll be a hard woman to live with, you'll be a continual temptation."

Roseanna laughed softly, then, in embarrassment, and new pleasure—and in amazement at him, that seemed to grow with each small revelation. He knew when to put a light touch, even to lovemaking to keep it from getting heavy. But she only said, "Silly—"

"Silly, eh?" Jonse gave her head a push that put it back on his shoulder, and wrapped the coat around her with his arms. And she did not want to sleep then. She wanted to lie there feeling him against her and know how wonderful were the arms of someone who loved you. They were strong and cherishing and masterful. And how good the lean warm length of someone you could feel so free to lie beside.

"Sleep carefully," Jonse begged her, so teasingly, so warmly, so comfortably she did sleep presently. They both did. Once she wakened, while Jonse still slept—to wonder at the warmth of knowing you're loved, even in your loved one's sleep; when you stir, to feel his arms go so surely glad around you. She moved nearer and slept again.

"Heigh, Happiness Maker," Jonse greeted her drowsily, when they both wakened.

How good were the drowsy kisses then, after sleep, almost the best of all because they were so unquestioning, and undemanding; just the natural expression of the rightness and sureness of love, and the gratitude for it.

She came clear awake, marveling at the lushness of sleep like that; even from that little of it to be able to wake up and stretch luxuriously, feeling whole in body and mind.

"Sleep is the most wonderful thing in the world," she decided.

"Roseanna, you've got me so mixed up, I wouldn't know," he told her.

Something was about to crack. She was too happy. But if something was about to crack she felt it would be toward eventual rightness. She felt a wave of that great cosmic pity that sweeps in to the happy. The air had definitely sharpened while they slept, and the stars. The last sharpness and the last brilliance of the night. A cold night, bringing instinctively the thought of home and warmth.

"I feel sorry for people who haven't someone to cuddle up to tonight," she felt extravagant. But on second thought, "I feel sorrier for people who have someone to cuddle up to and wouldn't want to."

Jonse huddled into the coat. "They'd have to hate 'em."

Roseanna laughed, and Jonse's eyes narrowed in sudden distrust. "Do you sleep on sheets or blankets in the winter?"

"Sheets," Roseanna was amused. "I can weave good ones, too."

Jonse was not impressed. He regarded her gingerly, as though the wind already were howling and another snow piling up on the one already high on their window sill. "Brr—" he said, of the idea of icy sheets, "I don't mind hardships when I have to have 'em, but I'm damned if I like 'em when I don't have to."

"It won't be so bad as all that, will it?"

"Oh no," he said politely. "It won't be so bad. Much better than my forefathers had."

Their easy, airy way together—that stopped abruptly, in astonishment that they could have laughed at all, in the threat to anything so lightminded as laughter. The amazement of the whole ride all at once struck her, its peace, and the planning in it on such small sure things as arguments

over sheets or blankets, when none of any of it for them had been sanctioned yet.

"Jonse, we're crazy!"

"Sure," he agreed. "And it's too late to get sensible now."

Roseanna said, very slowly, "We almost started a war just by wantin' to dance together."

"But we danced, didn't we?" he reminded her, steadily. "And we didn't start a war. We're an unbeatable pair, we are."

Jonse, Jonse. She looked at him humbly, in wonder.

"Well," he said matter-of-factly, "nobody's licked us yet. And to show you how glad I am to be takin' you home, I'm goin' to turn the moon up for you."

Through the hollows and woods they had come, there had been not much actual moonlight, just enough for the metal on the bridle and for the light of Jonse's eyes, and the lines of his face. But now, rounding a turn to a wide valley, there it was, bright! It was almost bright as day.

Roseanna put a quick hand on Jonse's arm. "Can you see your mountain from here?"

"It's that one, yonder—" He leaned forward eagerly, to point it out.

She saw it then, a peak that rose up a soft gray in that light, but definite, like a mark in a dream. It was higher even than some of the lower stars. She looked up at Jonse, and down again. She was crying, not violently, but unexpectedly. But although it was involuntary, it was quiet; something she hid quickly so Jonse would not notice.

Jonse drew the horse to a stop, and dismounted, frowning.

"What in the world do you do to a saddle?" he demanded.

Roseanna looked down, startled at his brusqueness. "I don't know."

"In about another minute Prince would've been shyin' from the thing slippin' and we'd have been off on our necks."

Abashed, Roseanna put a foot in the stirrup to clamber off, but Jonse lifted her, holding her casually for a second, before he put her down. "It'll be nice, havin' little things around," he mentioned.

Roseanna blushed. He still could fluster her—she had a sudden happy feeling he always would. But she pulled away from him, and her skirt hem caught in the stirrup. She stamped her foot, in exasperation at her own awkwardness, under his impious watching. "Oh!"

"Want some help?" he offered.

"No!"

Jonse laughed out loud. "Pretty knee," he observed.

"Haven't you any respect for me at all?" she half laughed, half wailed it. "Don't you love me for anything except a pretty knee?"

"Sure," he told her, unconcerned. "Other knee."

"You're terrible." She yanked her skirt hem free. "Gettin' so you can't trust anything any more, not even the good old saddle," she fumed.

Jonse struck an air of injury at her turning the subject. "Don't like it, huh? All right, I'll stop it."

She flew to him, in a rush. "Please don't ever stop!"

What did women do, she wondered now, who hadn't men to say these foolish extravagant things? Who cared whether or not they were meant? What would she ever do without Jonse now—these warm teasing things he said; she

couldn't, that was all. She held to him tightly, and he kissed her, feeling her fear.

"Please don't ever cry again, Roseanna," he pleaded. "I was rougher on you about the saddle than I meant. But I had to be, to keep you from skiddin'. I couldn't bear to see you cry."

She had not known Jonse knew she cried. How did he know always to do the right things about her? She clung to him, loving so much these small things that were growing familiar—the sureness of his arms around her, the goodness of them brought an ache; the hard gentleness of his hands roughing her hair.

"It'll be all right, dear," he promised.

She looked up quickly. "I liked the way you said that. You've never called me that before. Oh Jonse, wouldn't it be awful now, if we didn't have each other around to say 'dear' to?"

He agreed soberly, but like Jonse, too. "Wouldn't it foul things up, though?"

She drew her breath, sharply. She was so full of the rightness of their being together, she was scared—or would have been scared if she hadn't this sober feeling now that it all was meant to be, and so, would be. Yet the pull of it, the tension again of never quite and yet the yearning toward it, the heart and power of it made her all at once restless.

"Let's get on, Jonse, and face—whatever it is we're goin' to have to." She felt frightened, but ready.

He looked at her intently a moment, and said abruptly, a glint to it,

"I'd as leave have it over with now, myself."

He started tightening the loosened girth, although he

looked up to grin at her. "If you think I was just tryin' to comfort you a minute ago, you're wrong," he warned. "I'm apt to take a wicked pleasure in you."

But there was an abstraction to his audacity now, and Roseanna only smiled. A smile that came and went, quickly. The easy fun that lovemaking could be, was something she was beginning to know, too; as well as the wildness of passion that respect is lost in, to come again, the stronger for the losing. She was learning that, in the way everything seemed to come for them, in a rush, as though to make up for lost time—or else because there was so little time left. Her heart tightened, from a flick of premonition. It would take a great deal before lovemaking could have that freeness with rightness. It would take a great deal of proven foundation of liking and trust. It took the sharing of everyday things; the sharing of small joys, and faith in time of trouble.

"Jonse, what is your father like?"

It was the first time Anse had been brought into mention. Almost, in the shelter of their seeming aloneness in this night, the first time there had been actual, definite thought of him, for himself. She could feel the tightness come back to Jonse. He straightened, as though he had been brought up short from dreaming.

"He's rough," he said, carefully—trying, she knew to paint a fair picture of his father. "But he can be friendly, too."

Roseanna nodded. Her own father was not rough. There was something fine about Old Randall McCoy—fine like steel.

"Are you countin' on your father bein' friendly to daughter of McCoy?"

Jonse regarded her hopelessly, honestly.

"Nobody would ever believe," she had said once earlier that day, "that we're Roseanna McCoy and Jonse Hatfield," and Jonse had said back, "We won't tell them." But they had to tell Devil Anse.

"He won't like it," said Jonse briefly. "But there's nothin' he can do about it."

All at once, Roseanna was not so sure about that. "How are you feelin', Jonse?" she asked him, as he helped her back into the saddle. She needed his quiet glint right then, steady-ing her, maybe laughing at her a little for being worried and helping her plan, or rather planning the course of her meeting with his father. Jonse seemed faintly surprised at the definiteness of the question, but since she had asked, he tried.

"Dry, I guess. Dry and hot," he added. "And *very* clear headed." He swung up behind her, impatiently, "I don't know how the hell I feel. I know I quit thinkin' about it—a long ways back. You can only think so far, then you wait till the time comes."

"Then let's hurry," she pleaded. Hurry while the rightness of all this was still at its height, so they could harness it to something that would take it toward what they wanted; hurry while there still was some of that recklessness left that had taken them from her father's election field, that had swept them onward without doubt or question—while everything was still swift and right, before it could get dragged down by thinking. If only Devil Anse could know the peace and aliveness that had come with this ride!

Jonse gave the horse a cut, and it was off, at a canter, that mounted at once to a gallop as it sensed home and

fodder. Sometimes its shoes were muted as they hit soft ground, sometimes they struck stones with the sharpness of bullet cracks. Roseanna began to listen for which it would be. The moon, high, cold, impersonal now, gave the far hills the cast of slate. The nearer ones, as they rode deeper into them, stood black in their own shadow.

DEVIL ANSE was not home.

It was like a trick that had been played on them, to make them wait, when they had come so ready.

"He won't be home now till mornin', likely," Jonse's mother said.

The hand Roseanna had strengthened in Jonse's for their entrance, fell. He made the introduction of Roseanna to his mother shortly, saying only what he had to; in the way one who has keyed himself up to meet an important personage, finds himself having to say his business to someone secondary. And Roseanna felt dimly that something tremendous was happening, in this enforced drawing out of indecision, that she could not quite get hold of, and all at once she was too tired to try.

Jonse went to the fireplace, and took out his restiveness in knocking up the fire. The two women stood studying each other in the light of it, in mutual anxiousness. The innate cordiality had faded from the plump face of Levisa Hatfield when she had heard who it was her son had brought home with him. But it had faded to consternation rather than hostility, and Roseanna had felt more under-

standing of it than fear. She knew how it would be with her own mother if one of her brothers suddenly walked in with a Hatfield girl.

Jonse's mother was a big plump bodied, plump faced woman whose friendly eyes almost had lost themselves in the bunches of her cheeks as she had stood in the doorway to give greeting to whatever friend to her son he had brought home with him—albeit surprise that it was a woman person. Levisa Hatfield, it seemed to Roseanna, could be the softer side of Anse, just as Sarie was to Old Randall. Roseanna stood looking into that face as she would to hope. It was a face made for good-natured things, if they came pleasantly.

But it was a face that could stern, too. The eyes leveled, as they turned from the girl before her to Jonse again. The mouth straightened, with the two downward lines from it going into the neck creases. Roseanna's hopes trailed off, realizing then the whole of Levisa Hatfield was a woman made to think her man knew. And if Anse took a stand against the pleasant things—then it might grieve her, but Anse would be right.

"Anse will be home in the mornin'," she said, again, so saying that whatever decision was to be made, would be made by the head of the house, by the head of the clan.

"But you can take the night, Roseanna McCoy, and welcome to that."

The log in the fireplace burned in two, and broke, with a snap, and fell heavily in two pieces. Jonse picked up a poker and stirred them to fresh fire, angrily, and turned back, abruptly. There was no lightness to his care now. His eyes were worried.

"You didn't eat much back yonder," he reminded her. "You must be hungry."

"I'll go fix you somethin'—" Levisa started ponderously toward a center hallway that evidently led on through to the kitchen. She went as toward something she could deal with.

Roseanna could not have eaten. But Jonse's thinking of her, in small ways that he could now, was balm for its while in this alien house.

"Here then—" Jonse pulled the bench nearer the fire for her, and they both sat down, as they had on the log along the road. The whole day, that near about was going on into the next one now, seemed to have a pattern, that kept repeating itself, making a wild and rich thing; which in the morning either would be torn up and thrown away, or left to mellow, deep and mysterious and so beautiful people would see it, and know only enough to wonder, and remember. But that would be in the morning.

She looked around her, with the disinterest of weariness. It was a smoky, shadowed room, lighted only by the fire. In an opposite corner, facing the door they had come in, stood a great bed, with a red blanket on it. A straight backed chair, of some dark scrolled wood, and evidently brought in from below the mountains, stood beside it. Clothes hung from the wall pegs around the bed, lending a musty smell to the fire smoke. Several worn splint bottom chairs stood around the room, and a rhododendron root table, for the lamp which was not lighted. The mantelpiece over the fireplace, when she turned slightly, was a split log, of some hard serried bark. The mantel was littered with odds and ends, and guns were crossed over it, as decoration.

Levisa sat back by the table, watching them. Her black dress billowed around her, and the lines of trouble across her forehead were deepened in the firelight. The only brightness about her was a gold bar pin, at the plain high neck of her dress. Roseanna looked down at her ring. It was still beautiful. It was so simple, yet its design so exquisite. Her eyes softened.

For a space then, she turned and watched with Jonse, the fire die down. They sat watching the slow red heat crawling through the ashes even after the substance was burned through. And then the slow, hot afterward, too, was done.

Levisa stirred in her chair. "You're likely tired."

"Yes," Roseanna said, and knew with that how tired she actually was. She was nerve weary and bone weary.

They all arose. Levisa took the lamp from the shelf and started toward a closed door Roseanna had noticed vaguely back in the shadows, with her own shadow head against it, darker than the door dark. "You can sleep in with the girls."

Jonse's eyes were dark, intent.

"Good night—" his voice had a terse upward sobriety to it, an unfinishedness.

"Good night, Jonse—"

"First bed, left handed from the door," interrupted Levisa.

Roseanna went in, and closed the door behind her. From the other side she heard the turning of Levisa's footsteps; heard her say slowly, the words dropping like stones in a well,

"Anse won't like this, Jonse."

Roseanna stood strained, listening for what Jonse would

say. He said nothing. After what seemed a long time, she heard him walk from the room, and go up the hall stairs.

She turned and looked at the two little girls with whom she was to sleep. One, a chubby, very little girl, with wispy hair like straw, was snuggled down under the patchwork quilt. The other, with her freckled face half turned against the big feather pillow, looked to be about Allifair's age. They both were sound asleep. Roseanna tiptoed over to a stand and put the lamp beside a heavy crockery wash bowl.

She took off the white dress Bess had lent her, her wedding dress although neither of them had known it would be so. She hung it up carefully, on two pegs. The asters she had worn in her hair looked wilted and dried when she unpinned them.

In bed she lay carefully, cautious of the cornhusk mattress, not to disturb the child next to her. She lay alone. Her chest was suddenly hollow, and her stomach sick with discouragement about the morning that was coming near.

She tried to recall the fire she had felt in a thousand ways, a thousand times all that day, in the laughter and the yearning. But when she tried to bring it to something she could help Jonse present to Anse in the morning, it slipped away.

She thought of Jonse, somewhere upstairs lying alone too. Perhaps he had no spring left, either, no drive. Perhaps, if she had been with him, nothing necessarily might have come to take its place, but they could have given the effort warmth.

For herself, in his own house, she was homesick for Jonse. She missed him in all the ways there were. She thrust her head into the pillow, to go to sleep, to shut out vain thoughts.

But she could not sleep. The time till morning passed not

so much by hours, as by waiting, with everything draining out of her as she waited. Her tiredness grew, with all her high fire dragging down to nothing to begin with.

And then, she thought of her ring, and took it off, and stole it down over her third finger. With the feel of it there, she slept then. The thought of Jonse came all through the night, part light, part storm, but like a high peace.

She wakened early, while it was still dark. There was no sound of stirring in the house. But she could no longer just lie there and wait, and she got up, and went to a small paned window at the back of the room. Outside both earth and sky were the same deep unfathomable blue. She stood mutely, watching morning come, and already the sky was imperceptibly lighting, showing a hill silhouetted against it. It grew misty gray as she watched, and a path showed, touched with dawn. She wondered if it were a path that led up to Jonse's mountain. A lift of head, and heart, came with the sight of it.

Sounds began, few and plain. A cow bawled in the barn, and was answered. A corner of the barn showed through the window; its gray roof had the same steep slope as the hill. A rooster crowed, and away off down some valley but sounding near in the clear sharp air of the morning, came the caw of crows. A massive hound, skirting the back of the yard, started a high excited barking. Someone was coming. All other sounds of the morning were suddenly frozen in the pounding of hoofbeats. Devil Anse.

Shaking then, with nervousness more than cold, she washed in the already used water of the crockery bowl, and dressed. She looked at the dress in chagrin. In the light

of day its whiteness and freshness had suffered sorely from yesterday's wear. But it was all she had.

Heavy boots chomped up the front steps, in no uncertain manner. She could hear other steps hurrying—the heavy ones of Levisa; and Jonse's coming quickly down the stairs.

A not unamiable roar shook the house. "Visy, reach me the jug!" Followed by a disgruntled, "Hell of a world. You no sooner get over gettin' bit, than you go look up the dog again."

Waiting at high pitch anyway, Roseanna suddenly could have laughed, and she could have cried. She could see where Jonse got his way of saying things. But she was dismayed. She might have known Anse would have been spending the night drinking, but that had not occurred to her. It was not making a good beginning. And then, her breath caught. From the other side of the door, she heard Jonse saying,

"I've got something to tell you. There'll never be a good time for it, so I might as well get it over with. I fetched home Roseanna McCoy last night, Old Randall's daughter," just as he had said at their own first meeting, "I'm Jonse Hatfield, Devil Anse's son." Now he added, "and I aim to marry her."

Roseanna opened the door, to walk out with her head up—just as Anse sat down, hard, on a chair. Jonse turned to her, and said tersely, "Come in, Roseanna."

Black eyes ran her through, as she entered that doorway. Anse leaned forward to look at her, as though at an evil raised up against him in his own house. And in that first collision, an image of Devil Anse Hatfield was cut into Roseanna's mind.

Except for that slight lean forward, he sat as he had dropped. His big knees were far apart. The gun he still held upright between them he was gripping with hands that could have broken it. The muzzle of that long gun reached higher than his head. His lids lay low over unwavering eyes, with the skin hanging under them. An old hat sat as squarely over his ragged black hair as its dilapidateness would allow. His ears stood big and thin. His bony nose was the hard nose of a hard man, with two lines cutting deep from the nostril corners, into his dirty whiskers that streaked down over his wrinkled shirt front. A big horse pistol, with big brass rings in it, hung from a shoulder strap and reached crossways clear across his open cowhide vest. The shabby bagginess of his clothes did not hide the bony strength of his frame. He was somebody altogether great and terrible and mighty. But it was the eyes one came back to, that drew one back—as though once they took hold, they did not let go. They were searching eyes, tortured by what they sought.

A strong figure, an appealing figure it might have been—except Roseanna knew fear. The fear came from nothing she had been taught to believe about him. It came from a difference in the feel of the whole room; a difference in everything, as though when Devil Anse had come into it, a change came with him. The fear was in his silence, that struck everyone, including herself. Even Jonse, after that bold start, seemed to have the spirit cut from him. For the first time, Jonse seemed unsure. In a way, Roseanna could understand that. If circumstances had been reversed, and it were her own father they were facing, she was not sure she could have stood in her father's sight if once he were angry.

But she still had faith in Jonse, wanting him to break that silence. Now, Dear Heart—this is the time . . . and with that unspoken plea to him, there came a rush of anticipation to her breast. She waited.

It was Devil Anse who broke the silence. He rose in his place and spoke with the air of a man whose right it is to be the one who talks. His black eyes swept his son coldly.

"If I heard you right just now," he said, resting all the scorn he had on it, "you said somethin' about marryin' her. I'm proposin' you forget that. Ours is a proud name."

Roseanna grew slowly pale, almost as much from the first part of what he had said, as the last. He had not even called her by name! He referred to her merely as "her," in her own presence—cutting her off, blotting her out; wiping her out as a personality. Those eyes came back to her. There was no animosity toward her in them. There was nothing toward her at all. It was his hatred of her father he saw in her. That was what he had seen in that first boring survey, and had judged, and condemned. Now he was callous—thoroughly, utterly callous—to what this all might be meaning to the girl before him. She had Old Randall McCoy's name, and the proud name of Hatfield was not to be lowered by marriage with it. She could have been some trash his son had tolled home in a misguided moment, a moment that was sending his father cold with disgust and incredulity at its being the folly of even that long. That it could go any further was so unthinkable he seemed to consider it not worth talking about. He stacked his gun against the hearth corner; took the jug he had bellowed for from his wife's silent hands, had a swig, and belched.

"Great phlegm cutter," he commented, and set the jug in the mantelpiece. Then he yawned.

Roseanna felt ill, a little crazy, as though she were in a delirium. Jonse did not look at her. He was looking at his father.

Anse had thrown off his hat, and with his boots still on, started to lie down on the bed.

"Captain Anderson," Levisa dared to break into his obvious intention of going to sleep, as though the whole matter were at an end, "you can't do this to these youngun's."

The man whom she had called Captain Anderson—and dimly, as an added hopelessness, Roseanna heard in the name the times it could be a term of affection as well—said gruffly,

"Visy, if you and me talk about this, I'll get mad. And I don't want to fight with you." He let himself on down, with a grunt, placing his great head gingerly as though he were not quite sure of it. "I've got to get over this idea I'm the jug man I used to be," he told his wife wryly. "'Tain't so."

Levisa did not smile. "Jonse fetched that girl home with him, and she come in good faith."

Anse half reared up, for one last glittering eyed remark on the subject, to cut short, once and for all, any unthinking sympathy. He looked twisted as he half turned on the rough red blanket, like some twisted human thing awful in its warped power.

"I don't want to hear nothin' more about it! It's home-made trouble she's got herself into."

Roseanna fled. She felt, rather than heard, Jonse starting after her, and stop short, and go back. Roseanna ran on

down the porch steps, out through a gate, to the far side of a springhouse. She stood staring. It was true, what Anse had said. True the way he saw it. True the way everybody would see it; the way Cousin Zinny would see it.

Homemade trouble, he had said. Trouble was a real thing with people. It drew people together—when it was clean cut. But when the trouble was beyond the pale, when you were the troublemaker and had gone beyond the line of black and white, then people would turn from you, as from something unclean. When it wouldn't be unclean at all, it would have been something good that happened to the wrong people. If she just jumped off a mountain, that would make everything very simple. That would be clean. That would clean it up, make her have committed the final sin, in the lines of black and white.

And she was so utterly bewildered by Jonse's silence, letting everything they had thought so real between them be tossed aside as though it were nothing; and so quickly. After their times together how could he have done that! She couldn't believe it. Her heart hurt— There was a dull hurting through her whole body, as though the fall from anticipation had been a physical one.

She had been standing so unseeing she didn't know he was there, until, without a word, he was taking her in his arms. She stood sobbing in them. Last night he had asked her not to cry. But now, that she did, there was defeat in those arms around her. It was a defeat to which she had been so near herself yesterday in the thought of her own family's opposition to their being together, she could feel it in him now. She looked up slowly.

"What are we goin' to do, Jonse?"

"I don't know," he said, honestly, bluntly. But even talk-

ing about it together, it was not so complete a defeat. "When I get scared," Jonse said, "I stand still and wait."

Roseanna almost smiled at that. It all grew more reasonable now. Maybe she would be behaving the same way, if it were her father they were facing. "You can do about as you please, so long as you use good sense. When you don't, I'll *tell* you what to do." Old Randall would no more have understood than Anse, why out of a whole country of men, she should love only him whose name was scorn. It must have taken all the courage Jonse had to make that announcement to Anse. And when his father had railed, naturally he would stop to collect his forces.

"I tried talkin' to him again just now," he said grimly. "And I might as well have been buttin' my head against a stone wall."

He stared straight ahead. He was like a man facing impossible odds in one direction, and then, when he turned and looked at her, defeated again, by that, too. There came an intent, terrible kind of tornness in him.

"I want you to stay, Roseanna—but not if it'll make you unhappy."

She looked at him quickly.

"I don't like this any better than you will. But—Anse don't care if you stay—anyway."

She stared at him, and turned away sharply, blindly.

He caught her by the shoulders and whirled her around, and kissed her, hard.

"That's for all the times I'll want to, and won't," he said. "If you stay, I'll go up on the mountain and cut timber. We'll let him simmer down, then try it again. If he could just get to know you—" Jonse broke off, and finished,

almost defensively, "My father's a great man for his home folks."

Roseanna leaned limply back against the springhouse wall. If she'd had any pride at all, she would have left that instant. That was the way it worked out by reason. But the way it worked out in her mind she thought she could not endure not belonging to Jonse. And if this were the only way toward that—

There came the bluff voice of Anse, from the porch, above the clamoring of children.

"Hell of a house for a man to try to sleep." Some one of the children let out a chuckle, unafraid.

"What'd you fetch us?" they were demanding.

"Now what give you the idea I'd fetch you anything?" he returned in mock astonishment. "Although, come to think of it, there might be a sack of rock candy in one of my saddlebags—if I didn't forget it."

There came an answering squeal, and a scramble for the barn.

"You're good to 'em, Captain Anderson," Levisa's voice came, with, Roseanna thought, a touch of sadness in it, perhaps of remembrance of the stranger to the house, who had fled it in distress.

"I'll never get shot in my own house," Anse agreed blandly, as to his goodness. "I got a heart of gold, Visy," he assured her amiably. "I wouldn't touch a fly—unless it got too near. And then I'd murder it."

"Jonse," Roseanna gripped his arm deathly tight, "couldn't we go off someplace out of these mountains, away from all this?"

Even while he was looking at her helplessly—there was

no use trying to make little of what they were up against—she knew for herself the answer.

And maybe Jonse was right. Maybe it would work out. He could go and cut timber, and she could stay here and prove her worth. You had to go from one thing to another with honor. You couldn't just run away. And that's what they would be doing, running away. And if they ran from what was rightfully theirs, from what they had found yesterday and last night that was good and satisfying and worth fighting for—pretty soon they'd be running away from something else. There always would be something to run from.

But she was afraid of the daily, hourly meetings there would be with Anse. She was afraid of Anse. A fear that accelerated itself in her realization of it. She was afraid of those hard, piercing eyes of his, searching for what she did not know, but holding everything that came in their way, toward that search. Most of all, she was afraid of the hold he had over Jonse. It was true. Even now there was a difference in Jonse. He seemed to draw toward her, and then draw back.

"I don't know, Jonse—I don't know."

Again, as they had so often, they stood looking at each other.

Roseanna stood staring at the reflection of her own torn-ness in him. She remembered their headlong flight to this, their utter disregard for what the world was thinking; she remembered the way he had kissed her as they started toward the knoll—what anyone else was thinking they had never considered then; the moments by the hemlock, without the kiss that belonged to their need; their walking apart to it—even the need had been hidden from them at first;

she remembered the shining circle they had seemed to be in, with everything else dimly on the other side of the edge, as they had sat laughing on the log. She remembered the first brightness of his eyes that had brought them together, even though they had been in a crowd.

She stood with a sudden sense of events plunging fast and deep, with a catastrophic rush; toward what she did not know, and seemed beyond questioning—accepting destiny.

“I’ll—stay, Jonse.”

He caught her quickly in his arms, and after he had gone she stood quite still, in beating blankness of the fusion of that instant, that with the moments subsided.

She followed him slowly so far as the corner of the springhouse, and stood watching as he strode up the hill path. She watched him go up toward the house they had planned their lives in; going now without her. She watched him going away from all the small things they might have begun to share, the small anxieties and warm prides, the disappointments and the joys. It was the small things that you built up together, the dual experiences, that tied two people irrevocably together. It was a knowledge she had from seeing how it was with Bess and Phamer. She had had a little of it from yesterday. Now she knew it out of the emptiness of it. It came to her without particular lift, or on the other hand, without particular sadness. It was just so. The lack of height or depth was strange, after so much turmoil. But the evenness, the lull, was all right. It was a rest—or waiting; a getting ready for the next step that would present itself.

It gave a clarity to the life before her. She stood facing it with open eyes.

Long before this her father must have known that she had gone off with Jonse. But no word had come from him. Old Randall McCoy, for all Anse's slight of the name, was a man who dealt proudly. Since she had not listened to him, and gone against his judgment, no doubt he had closed his doors against her, and would cut off her memory. And this step which she had taken from him, her absorption in it for itself, cut him off from her. She knew he was there, but the eight or so miles which separated them might as well have been two worlds. Except for a relief that evidently he, like Anse, was not going to bother to make war over it.

It was odd, the turn this was taking. It seemed it was not Old Randall McCoy and Devil Anse Hatfield who were at issue now, but rather Old Randall's daughter, in personal contention with the head of the Hatfield clan, for a rightful place in his household.

Yesterday she and Jonse had thought their beautiful time together had been theirs not to keep, but to enrichen. It still was not theirs to hold, but to earn.

She looked at the house, where she was to try to fit in. It was a big long fronted house, with small square porches, upstairs and down, in the middle face of it. The porches were slightly sagging, as was the irregular picket fence around the yard. But flower things and vines were trailing over the fence, and through it. Yet there was nothing mellow about that house. It had a flat roof that threw a shallow shadow under the eaves, like half lowered lids over walled eyes; needing nothing, inviting nothing. There was a forbidding completeness to that house, with no place in it for a stranger.

The whole idea that she should even try suddenly over-

whelmed Roseanna. The whole endeavor of trying to make herself acceptable to Anse, filled her with utter panic. If only Jonse were to be there, beside her, to steady her. If only she could *feel* he were there.

"I'll be there for you, if you need me," he had said. She needed him now, in a strange way to ask, since it was being hard for him too. She needed his help to put this apartness for a while into positive action. She needed his strength to help her because she was not strong enough to do it alone.

"I'll be there for you," he had said. And she felt, after a while, that he *was* there, and she felt stronger.

She would try to live in Jonse's house as he would have her live. It began to give life and imagination to tasks ordinarily she would have shrunk from. She sought out Levisa, to see if she could help with the cooking. The flowers in the yard, too, gave her courage. Obviously they were Levisa's doing, and anyone with a hand for flower things would know about human ones, too. She was in the kitchen peeling apples to fry, from a tub of them beside her, when Roseanna went in.

"I'll help you, Miss Levisa."

The big woman's knife poised sharply over the apple she was paring. She made no comment on Roseanna's obvious decision to stay, but there was wonder in her eyes—and pity. She leaned far forward to brush the swarm of flies from the pared apples.

"Well," she said uncertainly. Then, she straightened, with a sigh. "It does hurry me to get the cookin' done," she admitted.

Roseanna felt she had at least one foot on the first rung of the ladder, with something definite to do, and could well imagine that cooking for the Hatfield men was no small

task. The fireplace, big enough to roast a whole ox, already was full with pots of boiling grits hanging from the cranes. Thick slabs of sowbelly were sliced to fry; pies, stacked four deep, one on top of the other, were on the table to be cut. And a lard piggin was out for biscuits.

"I'll get you a more fitten dress, though." Levisa came laboriously to her feet. "You'll get that one gaumed."

In the room where she had slept, Roseanna regarded herself in the dun colored work affair of Levisa's, in dismay, thinking of Jonse's glance, should he suddenly come down and see her in it. But a child's rawhide belt, hanging over a chair back, helped.

A hostile young voice broke in. "That's my belt."

The little towhead of last night was regarding Roseanna accusingly. Her features somehow made a straight line across her fat face as she kept it lowered, glowering. "I wouldn't take *your* belt."

"That's because you're a nicer person than I am," Roseanna told her, just as she would have said it to Allifair. "You mustn't hold that against me."

The little girl regarded her doubtfully, and then a slow grin spread over her chubby face. Roseanna smiled back at her, wistfully then; she would need friends in this house.

The child stood frankly regarding her for a moment, with that blankness of companionship coming to the look. "I'm two people," she announced. "And one of me is lost." She raised a candy sticky little hand to her eyes and searched some imaginary horizon.

Roseanna was on familiar ground now. Allifair was always playing make believe games with herself.

"Have you looked all around?" she asked.

"I haven't looked in the springhouse—" and the child

was off, leaving Roseanna with a warmth, a new confidence in herself, since Jonse's little sister had accepted her.

"Make plenty," admonished Levisa, as Roseanna started measuring out the lard, with her fist, for biscuits.

At home, her mother did most of the baking and Roseanna suddenly remembered the tension there had been at the table over one of her own experiments. "Maybe you could cook 'em up and make a stew," Tolbert had suggested. "Maybe it's the knife." Her father had given up trying to break his and acidly was hacking at it. "The knife," Little Randall had murmured, looking at his temptedly, leering at Roseanna, his teeth bared back. Her biscuits had been a joke at home. This was not the time for joking. And Anse approved over a mouthful,

"Best eatin' I ever eat."

"The girl baked 'em," piped up the chubby towhead who had befriended her.

Anse holed the child with his black eyes for a long moment. She squirmed uncomfortably. Then he said, indifferently, "She still around?" not putting himself out to look, himself. He ran his tongue around the inside of his mouth to clean off any leftovers—and sucked on a hollow tooth noisily.

"You want some more sowbelly, Captain Anderson?" Levisa, standing by, waiting table, asked it timidly, watching him.

He looked up at her curtly. "Naw. Somethin' I already et's not settin' good on my stomick." He chomped from the house.

Purposefully and obviously he was ignoring the newcomer. But after that first dash down to her attempts at friendliness, Roseanna thought she caught a look of puzzle

in those eyes, with the shaggy brows drawing over them. He seemed to be trying to figure out why she should be willing to stay. Happen, since she was, he was even beginning to be a little uncertain about where each of them stood, with Jonse.

It put a different slant on her endeavor. It was a new experience to find herself competing for something. She almost enjoyed this first taste of it. That puzzlement in those sharp eyes almost began to amuse her. She even felt suddenly sorry for Anse, if he were to go through as much emotional chaos over his son as she had. Poor Anse.

A gleeful idea hit, and she snapped her fingers, off in the hearth corner by herself. Her eyes narrowed through sudden laughter. "Poor Anse." It struck her as an excellent weapon to use the first time anyone stopped by. "Poor Anse," she would say lightly, amused—and the word would spread. It would get going around that the great Anderson Hatfield, who made such a gesture of being the mighty protectorate of a mighty clan, had come to the point of having to lay siege to just a girl, and furthermore was being discomfited. It would weaken that great name he set such store by. A merriness, a sense of healthy zest, of combat seized her.

But a little later, wearily, helping wash up the discouraging stack of dishes, she knew she would not use that vindictive attitude. What good would that do? None. She would try to get along with him, try to see the good about him. Jonse had said he was friendly. She almost convinced herself that he was being kind in allowing her to stay, likely knowing she couldn't go home now. She decided to accept that as it was handed out. Why not? It was simpler

that way, and more comfortable for everybody, than fighting it.

"That's a pretty pin, Miss Levisa." Levisa had on her gold bar pin, even on her work dress.

Levisa brightened. "Captain Anderson give it to me," she told Roseanna. "I'm never without it." Her tone said it was her dearest possession, in spite of everything.

Roseanna could understand that, even though her own dearest possession was folded away with her white dress. She had decided against wearing it. It might seem flaunting, and she did not want to make a mistake right now. But already she had stolen into the bedroom and taken it out once, looking at it secretly. And seeing Levisa's pin she wore so proudly, Roseanna remembered hearing about the jewels of Bathsheba; and even hearing about them, she had loved and exulted and gloried in them. Now as she thought of them, she would have traded all the jewels there ever had been in the world for the right to wear her gold ring on her wedding finger. She had worn it so, last night. But the wearing of it then had not meant nearly so much as the thought of it now. Her love now was surer, growing sure by trial. Even Jonse's silence before Devil Anse, and some difference in him, were small things as she thought about her ring. They were accepted and fitted into some deeper knowledge, like something that was deep in her bones, not put there by her making, but there to begin with—an acceptance of the knowledge of her need of him, and, a little oddly under the circumstances, as deep an inward assurance that he was being there for her.

"Now what can I do?"

Levisa answered almost apologetically, "I was aimin' to wash up all the rag carpets in the house today."

"I could do that!"

Levisa smiled, with again a suggestion of pity at the girl's eagerness. "It grieves me," she started, and stopped short, her mouth closed to a line, lest by any expression of downright sympathy she be disloyal to Anse. But she said kindly, "It'll be hard work."

"I don't mind—"

"I got a lot of sausage I ought to get laid by, and head cheese," said Levisa, vaguely. "The rugs are already up—"

Roseanna lugged the unwieldy pile of rugs down to the creek and for a while it was pleasant working in the sun, getting the fire going under the big black pot, watching the lye soap bubble up and spill over white against the smoked pot sides. But it was slow work, spreading the soapy rugs out on a flat stone and pounding them with a smaller one. It was the slower because she kept thinking of Jonse. It was an effort to remember, and something of a shock when she did, those first moments with Anse when she had turned to Jonse, for him to stand up for her help in this house he had brought her to—and had been turned back, and brought to confusion. Even recalled, it was immediately assuaged and forgotten in the thought of their happy times together. She would remember the protectiveness of his tone at this or that time, some small kindness; the search, the sweetness of his eyes. Or some light touched teasing thing they had had so little chance to know together yet would come back from last night's ride. She found herself stopping, again and again, not getting far with her work, and not caring, just being happy.

She glanced up toward the path. It seemed a habit she was getting into. It was the plainest thing in sight. It was just a brown dirt path, up through a field. But it was a

queer path. Each time it looked different, but it was always there. Now it looked calm and sure, and deep.

Both little girls whose bed she had shared last night, came up the creek bank. The older one, freckled as a young robin, and an imp, was teasing the wide-eyed, trusting little one as they came along.

"You've got one green eye," she told her.

"I don't neither!"

"I think you're old enough to know," the other was saying, with an infuriatingly superior kindliness. "I'm just tellin' you for your own good."

The little towhead looked not quite convinced, but worried.

"But don't you fret," the imp was going on, "a lot of folks can't tell one color from another. So if you don't tell 'em, they'll never know."

They had come up with her. Roseanna was listening to the nonsense, and smiled. "Don't let her fool you, honey," she consoled the little one. The little girl got a look of embarrassment, and ran on fast, with her sister.

Roseanna still smiled after them, and thought this would be something to tell Jonse. There were so many little things to tell him, already, as she was coming to know something of his side of the river.

She grew restive. There came back that feeling of things only half said between them. She looked after the two little girls. Maybe sometimes the children went up the mountain—Jonse had said it was only about a mile—and she could send him some word. At the thought, there came rushing to her mind, filling it, a thousand things to say to him, that had come up even in this short time apart. Her mind filled with them, and so did her body. Her body,

too, had a thousand things to say to him. She started framing some message, something casual. She just wanted to tell him she was thinking about him, but not to be bothered about her—he had his own problems up there. She discarded the attempt. It sounded too light.

And suddenly the tears were there. They did not fall. They were just there, making her eyes sober for a long time, as she went on with her work. She started planning some message that would set the real tone. But the real tone was too sad.

She soused a rug up and down in the creek water, rinsed it; wrung it out. Yesterday it had seemed so natural that they should be together. Today that was not so simple. They had to know they meant a great deal to each other to warrant going on like this. Question arose; uncertainty; doubt, even. In her mind then, she started over, and succeeded only in a nagging kind of word, clarified. She walked up the creek a ways, and back, feeling her chest tighten with the maddening futility of trying to communicate with him over distance.

She gave up the idea of trying to send him any message. Words could say so little. The trouble with this course they had set themselves was that it was turning into an affair of the mind, with everything between them having to be settled separately, at a distance—when they were two people who needed actual, physical contact for sureness.

And yet, she supposed the best expression they could find for their love right now was doing their separate jobs to earn it, and maybe because it was being so hard to try, when they really could come together it would be better even than before.

But that did not keep her from being lonely. Loneliness

was something new in her experience. To put it down she did the only thing she knew. She worked, going at the rugs. Yet so soon again, it didn't matter. She couldn't work, she didn't want to stay here and work. All she wanted was to be near him on that mountain, to talk to him, to let his interests be her interests—to be his whole joy; for her to be his. Her body as well as her mind ached and reached and yearned for him.

It took all her strength to keep the taps of thinking about Jonse turned off. At every turn, he was there.

"Cap," Levisa called from the house door, "holler for your pa!"

Jonse's younger brother Cap, almost as tall as Jonse, retorted churlishly. "You want me to strain my lungs? He's gone up to the mountain to see Jonse."

At the very hearing of his name Roseanna's heart leaped up with a force that left her shaken for a second. And then, her first instinctive distrust of Anse swept back. She had a racking conviction he was gathering himself against her in some way she did not know; that he was digging for Jonse's and her sureness together. It tore at her, and she threw herself, then, into her work, that he should have nothing ill to say of her to Jonse.

But when she saw Anse riding back, there came a quick flowering of hope in her breast, that Jonse had sent *her* some message—which she as quickly chilled, steeling herself calmly against disappointment. Likely he could no more have sent her a message, and especially through his father, than she had been able to frame one for him. Yet she hurried to wring the rugs out—after all only three of the pile were done—and managed to be hanging them over the picket fence to dry as Anse came toward her.

She had an urge to stop him, and tell him how it was. It should have been a simple and direct thing to do, just to say, "Jonse and I love each other, as you and Levisa do. We don't want to make trouble, and there shouldn't be trouble, just because two people want a chance to live like any other two people." But it was hard to follow a direct and natural impulse with someone who did not seem to know that she was there.

Anse gave no greeting, and she did not stop him. He marched past with no sign he had noticed her. She stood looking after him, half believing now Jonse *had* sent some message—

The black power of a silent tormentor: the smug black power—that silence, indifferent, insensate, closed; callous to her longing for cause for it to break, to hear life break through it. But it goes on hard, uncaring, a stone without a heart. She waited ironically until Anse was almost to the porch steps. She waited past all excuse for waiting, and flung pride to the winds and ran to catch up with him. She walked up the steps behind him so he would hear; hear her pleading footsteps behind him, and turn, and speak—He strode on in, tipped the jug from the mantel again, drank lustily like a thirsty horse. Then he boomed, with a malice stirring in his jocularly,

"Come on everybody, get your feet in the trough!"

Levisa was so busy lifting dinner she did not ask Roseanna how the rugs were coming; or perhaps she merely did not ask. Roseanna stayed back by the hearth. After that first piercing survey, Anse had paid no more attention than if she had been a hired servant. Less. And as Anse did, so were the others beginning to do. All the family

gathered in for dinner, but she was not a part of its life. It went on around her and over her, just past her. Even the little girls, she realized now, had run on without speaking when she had joined in their laughter. She remembered then, how Anse had set that pitch of indifference with the open faced little one, at breakfast. But why should he seek her hurt by taking away the only natural friend she had here? She grew awkward, hesitant, nervous in this ignoring of her. And finally there being no place for her in the house, she wandered self-consciously out the back door.

A feather fell from a bird that had lighted briefly on the pine at the back of the house. It was a white feather. It came down slowly, with a kind of heaviness. A wind blew in strong. The feather stirred a little, and was still.

She stood in the yard a long time, knowing the draining experience of realizing that all her best efforts might well come to nothing. What a fool she had been to even try to think Anse had meant well, that there was any honest kindness! Her mouth twisted with galling self-amusement. But Anse had the whip hold. What way was there to reach him? It came to her then there was no more way to reach an understanding with him than there was with a madman. She was repulsed, and afraid of him in a new way. But trying to think with understanding for Jonse's sake, she knew he was no more mad than hatred takes away reason. Anse hated her father, and he was striking at him, through her.

Anse came out from the house, his baggy clothes still slack over the heavy meal he had eaten, giving orders to the boys about fixing up the wagon; too good humoredly authoritative to notice the McCoy girl. Yet his conscious-

ness of her lurked all over him—she could not have said how—except that he looked like some wild gaunt cat with a bird in good prospect.

Instinctively a quivering had started up in her, as it was beginning to now at every sight of him; at sight of that hewn-out face callously averted from her, the rough black hair edging it like a hedge. But in that moment something happened. Roseanna knew Devil Anse as her enemy. She should have been crushed by that discovery, knowing the power of this man who was pitted against her. Instead she felt almost exultant. For the first time in her life, that she knew of, she had an enemy. She herself had a personal enemy. The discovery was as though underneath soft flesh she had struck hard bone. It was grimly good.

Her head came up, and her eyes narrowed. She felt hard and sure. The path too, when she glanced at it, looked hardened, and thin, with an edge to it. She knew now what it was Devil Anse was trying to do. She laughed to see it, with something of disdain for it. He was trying to force her into a trick of desperation—force her to run to Jonse, so he could give it out to all and every that the girl Roseanna McCoy was there, not married to Jonse, and it would be the truth, with less than any rightful position in the house; just hanging around as Jonse's woman. Well, Devil Anse Hatfield had another think coming! She would give him no cause to say she had behaved unseemly in his house.

She ate dinner rapidly, not knowing what she was eating, and hurried back to her work, throwing herself into it now. When all the rugs were finished, her back ached and her arms and legs were numb with exhaustion. She went down the creek around a bend, out of sight behind some willows and sassafras, and undressed and bathed,

keeping cautiously close to the bank out of the quick depth of the water. There was an enlivening freshness to the cold water and when she was dressed again she lay for a while on the bank, in the sun.

She let herself down carefully, experimenting with which part of her ached most. She discovered muscles she never had known she had before. But there was the satisfaction of physical labor in her weariness now. And it was good to feel the day in the sun still burning in her face; the warmth of it all through her clothes. And lying there, she thought if Jonse were there—then to clean, and to ache pleasantly, and to be warm and to be together, that would be about everything.

At the thought of him again, after hours of being too busy to think about him, to want to think about him, she lay now knowing the hourly, growing need of him. It struck again with all its violence, its high happiness. The longing thought of him grew more than she could bear. She turned restlessly.

It was the time of afternoon when shadows lie long and light, the sun easily on things; when the hills are quiet like the strong rule of a light hand.

She sat up, stark. For the first time that day she thought of her father, directly—about the pride he had had in her; the way he had counted on her. She sat up as though from a knife thrust in the back.

There came the sound of children's laughter, up by the house. She had accepted destiny in staying here. But there was one reservation, she realized. Her destiny was all tangled up with good and sweet people, like Little Randall and Allifair, with their lives still ahead of them. They must not be hurt by her, any more than they already had been.

They must not have anything spoiled, by being disillusioned or dishonored because of her.

She must try harder to prove herself in this house, for them now as well as for herself. She would give Anse no cause to demean those on the other side of the river. She would not even see Jonse until they could come together rightfully. She must be careful—she must be very careful. She would give Anse no cause to revile her.

Her fear of him was becoming an obsession, that was beginning to surmount all her happy thinking of Jonse. Still, the thought of Jonse was mixed in, like a torment.

She longed to get into his arms, into their warmth and goodness, and sureness; the shelter of them. She needed that feeling of shelter from the hurt the world could give, that protectiveness about her. She walked back upstream, to look up the hill—toward where all that could lie. It was a consuming thing again, even without its idyllic perfection. She looked toward the path, in a fierce urge to go up it, an urge like a terrible homesickness. It grew to be a devastating thing, destroying any useful clear thinking, taking up all of her mind.

The force of this impelling command Jonse had over her was a tremendous thing; so great, suddenly it almost was an evil force, because it was coming destructively on something that still could be good. She felt, for the first time, frightened of it, knowing how hard she would have to throw all the strength she had against it—hold it away—throw all her own strength and the strength of those whose happiness it still threatened.

“If thine eye offend thee,” Uncle Dyke had quoted, “pluck it out.” If thine heart offend thee, pluck it out.

But Uncle Dyke was far away, in Kentucky. She re-

membered the picture Little Randall had given her yesterday. She had forgotten it. She found it, in the pocket of the white dress in the room where she had slept last night. With burning, sternly sober eyes she stood looking at the picture of people to whom she was responsible for their wholeness; happy people in that blurred tintype. And with the tears streaming, she prayed for strength to keep them happy.

She would have liked to stay there a long time, but someone was coming. Hastily she hid the picture behind the wash basin, just as one of the younger boys, frowning as he slouched past, looked in at her awkwardly from under the bill of a cap he was pulling on.

There was an unusual bustle in the yard when she went out. The larger boys were bringing the team from the barn, and Anse was testing the stability of the mended trace of the wagon by knocking against it with the butt of his rifle. Children were running around in excitement. The big hound, lying watching, had its ears raised alertly. But even the hound made no mark of Roseanna as she passed through. Roseanna went to the springhouse, on the pretense of getting a drink of water, and went on by, the drink forgotten. She stood gazing across to the Kentucky mountains. They rose like gray tombstones, over the preceding day, marked, "Here lies all the purity of spirit I shall ever know."

A wind was blowing, with that heaviness attending rain. Roseanna stood thinking of the clear way the wind had blown yesterday as she and Jonse had stood together at the spring, with the need of each other not quite touched on, only an ecstasy yet. She could feel the brush of tears against her eyelids that seemed faintly always there now. She stood

sad at the whole irregularity her life had fallen into since that parting at the spring.

"Yesterday," she mourned, "Yesterday—"

Yet why should she go back to so slight a thing? She felt suddenly impatient and unbelieving of her hurting heart for yesterday, as though she doubted the authenticity of that ache. "Because," the answer came as swiftly and accurately as those bodiless arrows of memory, "I have known one perfect thing."

But perfection was only a high, thin thread of unreasoning beauty. And as she stood there, she could look back to where it had been. She looked on it as a light and perfect thing, but could turn in passionate gratitude for the richness, the reality since. The thin line simply had come alongside a broader, deeper track. And the two seemed to run along together—sometimes crossing, often tangling, bewilderingly—and then paralleling again, as now. She stood wondering then, with a kind of fatalistic abstraction, if sometime a separation would come, a final separation; or whether it would be a final tangle that would come, and whether it would be disastrous.

What a strange relationship this still was with Jonse and her, feeling they were straining toward some haunting something they hadn't quite reached yet, that they had to prove together. If only they could be having this proving time together. If only there was a chance to talk. Talking together was one of the essentials, already they had found that out. It straightened things out, and gave you a chance to laugh, and feel even closer afterward. If only they could be having the daily knowledges and the nightly knowledges of each other in which small things make two people known to each other as they really are—

She caught herself up sharply, at this slipping of the mind. "Careful," she warned, "careful—"

She had been so engrossed in her thinking that the activity in the yard had been lost in it. But when she came up from the springhouse, the wagon not only was hitched, but Anse was sitting in it, in the driver's seat. At sight of the big hulking figure there, the reins in one of those powerful hands, the whip in the other—Anse about to leave the premises—she felt a flash of terror, like sheet lightning before her for an instant.

She scanned the wagon in panic. The whole family was crowding into it. No, not the whole family. Jonse was not there. Her terror subsided to no more than the frightened banging of her heart.

"We're goin' up to Ellisons'. They're havin' a doin's." Levisa gave out the information as she passed Roseanna—with an eye to Anse, lest he turn and see them. But Anse merely cracked the whip idly. The hound dog was leaping up at the wagon end, barking in short chops of eagerness, its tail wagging stiffly. The children leaned down laughing and hauled him up into the wagon bed with them. Levisa smiled, almost apologetically,

"Anse likes to take the whole family with him when he goes to a merrymakin', even the dog." She came to a pause, and regarded Roseanna compassionately, but vaguely. "You look tired." Too much food, too much fat around the middle and the mind, too many ordinary things of the day for Levisa to have any blade edge sensitivity about the desperation that had driven the pale girl before into that work.

Roseanna only nodded. She knew, without being told,

she was not one of Anse's home folks, for all her tiredness toward that.

"We'll take the night," Levisa went heavily on toward the wagon.

In a kind of vacancy Roseanna watched the big woman clamber up over the front wheel, and take her place beside her husband. She stood while the wagon rumbled across the wooden bridge over the creek, toward the road.

This was the moment she had dreaded, when Anse would leave his own property where as yet she had no place, and open his mouth to the wind; let some slanderous word drop, which would get to her family. This was the moment she had prayed against, that they would not know until she had proved herself here. True, Levisa had said they were going only to Ellisons'. There were bound to be no McCoys, nor friend to McCoy, there.

Still, she stood taut, watching the wagon go, imagining the worst and thinking how to combat it. She had thought before that she would kill herself if this moment actually came; kill herself rather than have hurt come to the ones she loved. Now she knew that would not help any. It would just be proof that Anse's slander was true. She could only wait blankly. What Jonse did about it, would be his proving.

It occurred to her that never, not even in her greatest need of him in this lonely day, had she blamed Jonse. Nor should. He had not asked her, out and out, to stay here. That had been her own decision. But even if there had been cause to fault him, and if the end of everything sweet and good did come—she knew she still would not.

She went back to work, wondering that she could, taking down the rugs and trailing them back into the house.

But as she did, she began to feel better. As she got back into a familiar groove, her protesting mind and body fell, with a kind of obedient numbness, back into the groove, too. The various aching parts of them did not have a chance to be individual.

At the door the rugs dropped to the floor. There was a long, vacant other moment. It was not until then that she realized her first instinctive panic at that wagon load of Hatfields preparing to set out had been, not for the betrayal to her family—but the fear Jonse was among them, going away from her with them. In that moment she had been too emotionally charged to think about the ones across the river in Kentucky. Even at a crucial time like that, her instincts had turned to Jonse. It was only her thinking that drew them apart. Mind over heart. Mind mixed up with heart. When would it all get in order?

It was the time at the end of the day when yesterday in their dreaming he would be coming home, happy to be there; smiling at the little things in her day; the time when his sardonic comments on the rest of the world would make her laugh. And then that quiet would come, as it had for a space, on the ride last night.

The hill path, with the end of day look to everything and to it too, was a quieter path, a broadened path; a beautiful path. And at some time she did not know, she was smiling, sure Jonse would be coming down directly.

As the actual prospect of an evening together unexpectedly took shape, she began flying around then, getting the house ready for him. She wasn't tired any more. She felt fresh and alive.

Always this between them had gone in cycles; sometimes so desperately struggled against—but again now she

was happy, at the thought of seeing him, any minute, likely. How long those minutes were, even though they were crowded with more things to do than there would be time for.

How rich she felt! Beginning with the last thing first she had an old fluted sugar bowl full of roses—for once all the roses she wanted, and extravagantly just buds. Then she went racing from room to room with the rugs, some of them wet still, but no matter. She wanted his house to look well for him.

She looked with curious haste at the great upstairs room where she had not been before. The center hall, with the stairwell, was cluttered with sundries: bins of oats, rye, seed, a big broken spinning wheel, odds and ends. But the room upstairs was bare except for beds and guns. Guns were carelessly everywhere, as though there were plenty of them. The whole wall opposite the beds was pegged with racks of them.

She wondered which of those rough hewn beds was Jonse's, and decided, since he was the oldest, it was the one nearest the door. She smoothed the patchwork quilt that covered it—imagining the prettier one she would make for him, when they were in their own house. The imagined fineness of a woven coverlet smoothed under her hands—She glanced up. The branches of a tall white pine tipped just at the edge of one side of the window. And in her mind's eye it was one of the pine trees on Jonse's mountain, growing beside his cabin. It was so real in her mind she almost saw it. How nice it would be to have a window draped with pine—

She came back, to this barren room of the Hatfield boys, and thought of her brothers' room, not unlike this, outside

her own at home. She thought of Little Randall's voice, high and husky with sleep, querying "Hmmm" as she used to stop by to wake him of a morning. She'd miss Little Randall. But how good to love, to be delighted in, as she had been last night. How good to love! Someday would this strange wideness of life turn to ashes? She could not see why it should, so far as she could see, which, again, was not far, because she was happy.

She scanned the possibilities of food, and there was plenty. There was head cheese already fixed, which she discarded. "I hate head cheese," she decided. "You come upon such unexpected things in it." For the first time all day she felt a lightness of mind. She sliced white meat from cold wild turkey, and put honey in a small dish—choosing recklessly the best of everything in the larder. She hurried with her preparations, eager for him to come, so happy she didn't hate anybody—"at least," she amended, "not anybody I can reach out and touch." She felt an evil glee at these liberties she was taking with Anse's house. Wouldn't he be surprised? She had a brief surprise at it herself. "Search your conscience, Roseanna," she admonished herself. "I've looked," she assured herself airily, "and there's nothin' there. My conscience doesn't trouble me, why should I trouble it?" She hauled the heavy table around so that the end she had set for two would be nearer the fire. She was in a mood to move by hand!

When everything was done she could think of, she washed again, put on her white dress and combed her hair, pinning in some stray pinks she had found by the fence. As she reached in her pocket for her ring, her gladness at the thought of Jonse deepened.

"Heigh dear one," she greeted him, in her mind. "Know

something? All day I've had the thought and feel of my ring on my hand. It wasn't really there, when I'd look down to see. But I did wear it all last night, just to keep near you. I couldn't wear it today. Yet you see, the thought of you stays in it."

The greeting came before thought, but soon she really could say it—tell him how much she loved his present; how much it meant to her.

It was coming on toward dark, and she took the lamp into the front of the house, and lighted it, and set it on its table, and stirred up the fire. Then, the house in as much readiness as she could make it, she went to sit on the porch steps. She waited. Dusk was taking away the small things of the day—a hoe hanging over the fence; the color in the yard. When she wandered to the side of the house, the path was all but lost in the general soft dark of night coming. Soon it would not be there at all. She wandered back. All day she had needed him so much; some sign of bolstering reassurance from him. She needed to know that everything was right between them. Each hour, each moment, all day she had been waiting.

There began an ironic expectation of disappointment—likely he was too busy cutting Anse's wood to even think about her. Yet even at that flare of spleen, she felt a sober contradiction.

It was not quite night, not quite day. The hour had used up its light and now was nothing particularly; just waiting. There was no sign of Jonse. But Roseanna could not get over the feeling that he was thinking of her too. It was not that she refused to believe all evidences to the contrary when still he did not come. It was simply that she could not, she *could* not, make herself.

She stayed glad as full dark grew and a moon showed. She could not understand it. Was it the quiet warmth of his voice that seemed coming to her now in the thought of it again? She did not know. She should have been driven, unhappy as time went by without him. But a kind of happiness that stayed sure, in spite of everything, stayed in her.

Her mind drew forward to his coming for no other reason than just a desire to have him near, just because she would rather spend an evening with him than with anyone she knew; joyous at the thought of seeing him again. It would only be for an hour or so, for supper and to talk a little, without tension or desire—certainly without desire. That she definitely decided as she waited. That she was sure about. She had fought that battle for the day. She intended that never should be again, until they could come to it rightly.

Yet when she heard the actual sound of his step, actually saw the strong form of him through the dusk, coming to her, that quick unexpectedness sprang to her breasts—her very bones ached with it. She leaped to her feet, and started down to meet him, a glad hurting consciousness all through her body, a lifting aching.

She stopped short, at the foot of the steps, in despair. When would she be able to convince her feelings as she had her mind! But there was no sign of her inward turmoil in her greeting. "Heigh—"

He came up to her, and looked down at her quickly. "Heigh," he returned. He did not touch her, nor did she want him to. But the sound of his voice again was reassuring. There was not much of the personal warmth in it there had been last night on the ride, and none of the recklessness of earlier. But that only occurred to her as a faint thing

not to consider in her faith in him now; not an urge to faith, just a bottom faith on which everything was built.

"How was your day?" she asked him.

"All right—" he said briefly. Again he looked at her quickly, as with something on his mind he wanted out with. But that, too, she only half felt.

She went ahead of him, up the steps and into the house. They stood facing each other, facing their real first moments alone together all day. Her eyes went over his face in yearning, and it was as she remembered it. His hat was pushed back on his head, and his dark stubborn hair was tousled, as though she had run a hand through it. She had not, although she longed to.

Jonse turned from her abruptly, and went to the fire, and stared into it. His evasiveness now was too marked to go unnoticed. She stood puzzled, and then reminded. This plan they had set for themselves could only work if they did not continue in their violent need of each other. They must let it go on only in the peace of the knowledge of its presence, and not indulge it. She moved away herself, to the other side of the room, and turned the lamp up.

"You're tremblin', Roseanna."

Roseanna looked up. His eyes were on her hand on the lamp, his face very sober.

"Yes—" Then, after all her winged preparation, she found herself making the offer of it awkwardly. "I—fixed you a mite of supper—if you'd care for it—"

The very natural thing she had done in fixing supper for him seemed somehow to oddly relieve him; as though the invitation held something he had to know. "Sure—" he seemed glad about it. He put his hat on the mantelpiece

and followed her into the kitchen, and then stood looking at the care with which the table had been laid.

"Did you do all this for me?" There was a restrained brightness to his eyes now. She did not notice the restraint too much. She was just glad to see the brightness.

"I do a sight of things for you," she told him, lightly, and lifted her head for him to smell the pinks in her hair.

Jonse laughed a little. "Roseanna, you make me dizzy."

This was more the way she had planned it. She just wanted to hear him laugh, to hear him talk. "What did you do all day?" she wondered, as she took up the supper.

"I walked, walked, walked that damned mountain," he told her. "My feet hurt from the knees down. I feel like your mail carrier, except I haven't a pension to look forward to."

At his way of putting things, Roseanna felt the amusement at them she had before. It was one of the refreshing things she had looked forward to. And then it was gone. That lightness of remark—it was as something not forgotten, and felt kindly about; but just a gesture of present good will between them. Roseanna grew slow about lifting the baking sweet potatoes from the ashes.

"I thought you went up to the mountain to cut timber."

"I did. But some calculatin' come up I had to do."

"Oh."

He pulled up a chair. But somehow, it was not quite as they had planned, his coming home and crossing the room to his chair as though he were glad to be there. As they sat at the table there was a mixture of both yesterday and this change in him today—both stopping short just at the surface, making constraint. They ate little. Once or twice

Jonse put down his fork, and looked at her, with that something on his mind to say, quick and straight; and not saying it. Nor did Roseanna say anything of what was uppermost in hers, of what they had at stake yet in proving.

And for all the eager little things she had to tell him, some of them to make him smile, none seemed to come to her now. Nor did he make any of those remarks that so delighted her, nor any of those ridiculous ones that flustered and pleased her. There was not the assurance of even those little things to tell them they were together in a citadel. This was not being the evening they had dreamed yesterday, to heal the wounds the world gives. It was not that end of a day, when the day begins. It seemed impossible, after the ease there had been between them during their ride last night. But it was so. They seemed altogether to have forgotten how to be easy together.

And yet, increasingly for Roseanna the incisive question that had been in her all day was mounting under the constraint. She had to know things were right between them before she could go on. If things were right with them, even though they were apart, she could do anything.

"I thought of you today," she told him, "so many times." And then, in a rush of warmth, of wonder at it. "It's been kindly a wonderful day, Jonse." A strange day, with constant strife and turmoil in it, and the need of him pulling and scolding, but with causes for great happiness in it as well, in the way that need had grown, through everything. "I hope it's been a little wonderful for you, too."

"It's been a sorry day, for me," he said, bluntly.

Roseanna fell silent, cut off.

"I've found out some things about myself I'm not very proud of, Roseanna."

Roseanna wondered dimly what they were, but she was too confused to even quite hear. She started clearing the table, of the food that scarcely had been touched. As she was emptying the little dish of honey back into the great crock of it, she thought of the joy with which she had prepared this supper. There came a dull wonder at the way Jonse could put all the pleasure into living, or take it away.

Jonse had risen from the table, and got out his pipe. He packed it, and when it went out after a moment, let it grow cold. He thrust it back into his pocket, and started walking about the room restlessly. And then, he came directly to her. All her struggle and despair against the longing for the touch of him came back, and her decision against it. She half turned away, holding him back, unyielding, in mind as well as body. And as he stood before her, she looked up, troubled. His eyes were questioning, pleading.

"Could I kiss you, just once, Roseanna?"

She was faintly surprised he should have had to ask, just that; and at his way of asking, the sadness in it.

"Of course," she told him softly.

He held her close, his kiss tender. They drew apart, looking at each other soberly, and then, with all his pent up passion he crushed her to him.

"Oh my God, I'd forgotten anything could feel like this."

And by the disturbance of her own body, by the lift of disturbance through her, rising from her very depths all the way to a terrible and lovely thing—she felt, by happiness again in his arms, that they were together.

She lifted her head from his shoulder and said, in all the clarity of it to her, "I feel very sure about us now, don't you?"

Jonse let her go, and looked straight ahead. "I don't know."

It came like a crash. She drew back, unbelieving. She tried to say something, but as she tried, she felt as though she were suffocating.

"I feel a great wrong about havin' brought you here, Roseanna. I knew it this morning. I should have let you go then. But I couldn't. I thought it would work, but it hasn't. And we'd only be foolin' ourselves to think it ever would."

Whether it was that searching honesty, as familiar to her as her own clothes, she did not know; but it lingered in her, delaying her pain a little. She finished up the few dishes, with a sense of pause attending it. The pause was a waiting for strength of direction. She tried to think why he should be unsure now, going back over her experiences and observations and knowledges of him. He had seen her yesterday, away from any immediate opposition to her. And he had brought her home where she didn't fit, where too plainly she was a galling reminder of her father's name. Jonse himself, she remembered, in the clear light of day had been startled at what he had done. And once under his own roof, the old habits and ways of thinking very naturally would come back. She was probing gropingly, earnestly now, her eyes lowered by the weight of tears that did not fall.

Then she stood very still, knowing something. Her own sureness was still there, even with the acceptance of the lack of niceties to dress it up. It occurred to her that never once, since Jonse had brought her here, had he said "I love you." But just now, in his arms, it had got down to rock bottom. At last there was complete recognition of how it was with

them, essentially. Yesterday in their brief times of freedom together, she had known enough of the trimmings to have expected them still. But this was essential; this was basic. They were just man and woman together—as they had said at the hemlock; drawn back and back because of physical desire. What did it matter if the word Love itself were not used to grace it. Love was just a word.

She wanted to tell him so; that that was still there anyway. She started to, impulsively, and held back. You do not say “I love you” to someone who has turned away from you.

He had turned away from her. She met it with a stillness such as faces death. And then she knew she had to keep her pride. She had to keep herself to herself now. She said, looking at him very soberly,

“Good-by, Jonse.”

“Where are you goin’?” His tone, too, was sober, and shaken.

“Back to Kentucky.”

There was a long blank pause. Then, “Will it be all right for you there—now?”

She almost smiled, that smile of the eyes at the quality of his voice, that she had remembered. Almost the tears started at its goodness. But she mustn’t act weak before him. She must keep herself to herself.

“I’ll get along.” And she knew it sounded flaunting.

But Jonse seemed to accept it. They stood helplessly for a moment, restating the whole struggle between them, the draw, and the drawing back. The hurting was not so sharp now. Even the suffocation was only a first thing, that had gone with effort. There was just a general hurting all through her chest.

"Well," she said, and held out her hand, in parting.

Jonse took it, and stood looking down at it, oddly. "I see you still wear your ring."

"Yes—"

She could not even tell him how much his ring meant to her. She held back again, in pride. She had held back or been held back, for so many reasons by now, from these impulses toward him, she wondered if ever she could see one through, even given the right to. Because love, by rights, flourished on expression of it, in word and deed. Would it be, from this constant holding back, that someday there would be nothing to say? And why had she said "someday—"

Jonse turned and stared into the night through the open door, and after a long moment, said, "I'll take you. That's a bad road. You can't go alone."

At his care, even in this in seeing her through the night, she felt almost right again. It was a minored rightness—he was letting her go; but there was something sustained in it.

And then, whether as explanation or questioning of their parting, he said,

"Anse come up to see me today."

At the very intrusion of the name, all her tiredness, all the cancerous irritation of Anse all day, all her nervousness came back.

Jonse reached abstractedly for his pipe. The fill he had half smoked before was still in it and without reloading he struck a match to what was there.

"Anse gave me the promise of the mountain."

She stared at him, hearing what it was he had said. Pieces from the morning till now began fitting in, with twisting irony. She might have known something like this would

happen. Jonse had told her yesterday he had to have something once, and then he was through. He had told her not to love him, that she would get hurt. She had been warned. Yesterday he had wanted her and had gotten her, and when he was through with wanting, she merely had proved a step toward getting his mountain. Her mouth wrenched, and her head gave the faintest lift upward of salute. Jonse Hatfield was a forthright man. He set his sights and went toward them.

And as long as she had known him, before she had known him—ever since she was—she had been going in some blind urge toward him, the need of him urging her on. But she knew what that mountain meant to him. It was his fight for self-certainty and power. She would have given him up willingly, if that would have been a part of his getting it. But Anse had played on it, to get what he wanted for himself, to subvert them both to his cause. The force of her hurt did not strike fully till then. When it came, it came in anger. It was sharp and definite, bringing a clean up-sweep with it.

"So that's why Anse was pussyfootin' it up to see you! I knew it was somethin' underhanded, if he had anything to do with it!"

Jonse doused the flame with a swift gesture. She could feel his anger rising with hers. Across the table they faced each other tautly.

"Are you goin' to take it?" Her voice was level and hard.

"I might." There was a cold steady hardening of his own.

They stood with a hardness of mind between them. Distantly there came the rumble of a wagon. Anse changing his mind and coming back, likely. That was all this evening needed. It was Anse who was making all their trouble. If

they had been let alone to work it out together, they could have turned any trouble to their own use. But Anse's malice was preventing that. The wagon came nearer. She heard it rashly. Let him come! All her bitterness rose to strike. It was too shakingly in her to keep, even after the wagon rumbled on by. It came flailing out, in sarcasm.

"Your father should be a very happy man," from what he had accomplished. "He should go around whistlin' while he works."

Jonse walked away across the room, abruptly. "You don't know my father like I do."

"Maybe not. Remind me not to get to know him better someday."

Jonse made a short sound of grim humor, that stopped at once.

"It would have been nice," she went on acidly, "if Anse and I could have gotten on today, like you planned. But that takes two, you know. And I couldn't be both of 'em."

Jonse held back, with obvious effort, from retort. Even as she was drafting another cutting remark, she knew he was being remarkably patient with her. She should not be criticizing Anse to him. Whatever he was, Anse was his father. Certainly she should not have been so flighty about it. In that she was being unfair to herself as well. If she were going to criticize, she had real basis. And that would have been fairer to everybody; brought the fight into the open. But her private hurt had gone so deep it seemed to cause that inward fire to flare at unpredictable places on the surface. Only now, when the fire was so nearly gone, when the beautiful glow of it there had been at first, and the searing destructive hurt of it—when even the embers were black and nearly dead now—why it should be from

that ugliness and ash the small petty flares should spring, after so long of honest trying, she did not know.

She had come into this house with a fire in her, weakening her with every thought of Jonse. She was going out of it with the fire going out, too. It did not leave her cold, but with a level feeling, a little like ashes.

"I'll go now, Jonse."

He looked at her a long moment, and then, without a word went to the barn to get his horse up. Roseanna went into the bedroom and got her sunbonnet, turned out the lamp in the front room, and went outside to wait. She was not desperate at all as she had been so many times when she had waited for him, nor even sad exactly. It was merely that there wasn't any light any more, now that the dreams were gone.

She had an odd, surprised feeling of having passed a mark. This marked the end of something. The end of waiting for something that would never be. She realized it without emotion. Indeed, it was emotion that was behind her. Once before an ending had come; a sense of a natural conclusion, there at the spring. That had been simple and neat. But they had not been able to accept that. The thing had seemed to have to drag itself out to its own exhaustion, leaving a lack of grandeur.

There was a rain circle around the moon now, and only enough light to give a cold look to everything. Jonse was coming, with Prince, the horse that had brought them here last night. She thought of that flight with no particular feeling—or rather, an acceptance of disappointment in Jonse. He had not proved all she had so fiercely imagined; or longed for. And she had the same kind of acceptance that she had fallen short for him, too.

She turned, for a last ironic look at the house that flight had brought them to. Captain Devil Anderson Hatfield's house. She pulled the heavy door to, behind her.

"Give your father my love," she said.

Jonse threw the reins over the horse block, and came up the steps. He looked broodingly at her a moment.

"My father's a hard man, Roseanna," he admitted. "But he's been made that way, by circumstances. He's the leader of hard men."

But at his coming back up on the porch, when he merely could have waited for her, she knew all the things that had gone wrong between them personally were as much her fault as his—and more. She had a feeling now, he had wanted to talk to her about all this. But no doubt her tenseness, her flaring at every mention of Anse, had driven him away.

She looked up at him, puzzled by the whole turn of things, and angry again. "I don't know what this is between us, Jonse. It can't be love. Love is kind and considerate and good."

And he said, looking at her steadily, "Not always, Roseanna."

At his tone, his nearness—the old directness, the draw, was back. She leaned against the closed door, in honest hopeless acknowledgment of it.

Neither of them had come up to the other's expectation. They would some day, some night, some unexpected time. And with that, everything they had ever meant to each other—everything they could have meant, swept back. And her whole hatred, her whole fear of Anse, she used as a weapon to defend that. Even as she used it, she could feel

it turn on the very thing she would protect. She tried to stop herself, and could not.

"It must take a small man to wage war against a woman. It must have given your father great pleasure to hurt me, when he knew I couldn't hurt back."

Whatever else she said she did not know. She only knew that everything she had ever heard against Anse came in a blind rush, and she used it to slash vindictively.

Jonse was quivering with restrained rage, with cold explicit hatred of her now. She could feel it but she went on.

"Someday I'll have my turn at this!" It was a grim prediction.

Roseanna went right on destroying. Until, his mouth straight, his eyes blazing, he came toward her. She thought he was going to strike her. But his hand only touched hers accidentally, as he reached for the latch. He drew away quickly from the touch, as though even that much contact was physically, violently distasteful to him. He flung open the door.

"The road will be plain by daylight." He strode down the steps.

Roseanna stood where she was. And then, like one waking, her eyes dropped to the eerie light of the fire that fell from within, out from the house across the threshold. She stood staring at that threshold to Anse's house, where she had stood maligning him. The body of Anse might as well have been at her feet. She felt she had killed Anse. And she knew she had killed him, for Jonse.

She ran down the steps, after Jonse. "I'm so terrible sorry—I didn't mean to say all that—I don't know why I did—" There was more that came in a flood.

And she knew, by the look he gave her, she was only further demeaning herself by the complete abjection of her apology. He wheeled, as though he were revolted, and left.

Roseanna went back up the steps very slowly, and into the house. She stood for a long time in the middle of the floor. Yesterday, at the rally she had sought out an older woman, who might know all the terrible things that could happen to people. She thought of that ruddy blue-eyed friendly face, and hoped Het would never know the shame that comes because you have hurt somebody; not neatly, not fairly, not even decently. She had waged her war against her enemy by hurting Jonse, whom of all people in the world she would not have hurt. It did not matter that she had not meant to; that she had struck back because she herself had been hurt, and afraid. The hurt was done.

If she had had anything left to go with, she would have gone on back across the Tug that night. It was not a lingering of the will now, but a reluctance of the legs that kept her. Her weariness was all through her, a gray dullness. Her breathing was like air pounding inward. Her mind went around like dead leaves.

All the things she had said against Anse were true. She merely had fought against him, who fought against her. And with that, she found herself in her mind eagerly crucifying Anse all over again. She went into the bedroom, suddenly tired unto death, as though recognizing the hold of a bad habit, a stale and soul degrading habit.

She sat down on the edge of the bed, in a stupor of body, too tired to even start undressing. But the events of the night went on relentlessly. She sat seeing how they had plunged down, down—to a degraded end.

She could not understand what it was that had happened to her. Before she had known Jonse, she always had been accounted a gentle person. But she had known through Jonse first excitement, then hate. And she had known what love was, if you could call it that. It still was not the love of Phamer and Bess; kind, tolerant, wise. This had been, except for brief intervals, turbulence itself, in all its extremes.

She had thought yesterday Jonse could bring out all the woman in her. Then she had been thinking of the kindness a woman can be—the full warmth a woman could be. She had not thought to have all the woman fury brought out, too. She had not known she had that.

But now in the morning, she was leaving all of it. She did not know how her family would receive her—or whether they would receive her at all. That she would meet when the time came. But whatever happened to her now, there would be none of this passion in it, which the love of Jonse had roused in her, bringing it out in all its full violence. All that was behind her now. And knowing it was finally forever over, there was a heaviness in her. Yet she had been at the bottom, expecting it, and by now the preparation was so familiar she accepted it quietly. At least she would be going back inwardly cleared. No lift attended it, not yet—that would take time.

Yet, in a way, it was like bands cut. She felt a sort of daring now. Vague, wide world dreams that always had half lain in her, came back; put away since yesterday, answered. Since yesterday for the first time in her life she would have been willing to marry; she would have found her freedom in being the subjected woman; it would have been her whole happiness. Now that Jonse had closed the door on that, she would feel free to go ahead, if there would

be no place for her among her family. Her head went up, a sureness came, a kind of conquering of anything that might rise in the way.

The conquering feeling did not stay. It was not exactly gone, but its determination seemed to have slipped away. Still, still was that impulse to turn to Jonse—and it would be there for her, in anything that happened.

Yesterday she had felt sorry for anyone who had never loved. Now she thought it would be a very comfortable way to be, as she sat there in the dark, on the edge of the bed, with her heart aching. The heart aches all the time, all the time when you're away from someone you love—away from them when they have made it so, because they've gone away from you. It's that, that makes the distance.

There came the creak of a hinge, faintly, borne away by the wind. But she leaped to her feet feverishly. Jonse was shutting the barn door. He had not gone yet! She had no idea what she would say when she got to him, but she had to see him. She ran mindless from the house, and met him as he was starting up the path.

They were hard and wordless in each other's arms. Rose-anna's face was against his shoulder, her fingers hard into them. That was all. They stood long, intent. They had gone through fire this night and day. But the draw still stayed, like magnetized iron, through everything. There was little sweetness left. She wondered if that ever would come again—with the release and exchange of force for the small, easy, kindly times. She did not know. Since probably they would never have those times, she would never know. But the thing had burned down to a hard need; an acknowledgment for what it was, without pretense, from both of them now.

They drew away, and in the half light of the night stood looking at each other in utter gravity.

"I'm glad you came, Roseanna."

"I had to."

They stood looking at each other, only acknowledging it, not yielding to it. But the very acknowledgment came as a kind of truce. It was the nearest to mutual ground she had felt since their old first fire.

"I'm sorry about—everything that has gone wrong for you." It was regret without abjection, nor abjection did she want from him, nor care about. But at the warmth of his tone, going down in deep and good all the way, she said it. She had to say it, just once, without restraint. She said,

"I love you—" the words ending abruptly, because if she had stayed, she would have cried. She went quickly to the house. He did not call after her, nor follow her. But she had had to tell him, and felt, for the first time since their discovery of the need of honesty between them back by the hemlock yesterday, completely so with him again. Now her honesty was heedless, since, his lack of response saying so, *she* was the one who loved, not he. Yet it was not without regard for pride—rather a lack of shame to anything so real and whole.

She had given herself completely to life in those three words. It was no excuse, but an answer. It was the final answer, she realized, as she stood alone again in the house; the pulling up of the whole pattern of this strange affair. It had started out as a battering toward something that maybe wasn't there but that kept pulling them on; both of them doubting it, fighting it until tonight, when he had told her in so many ways that it was no longer both.

As she started to take off the white dress, she remembered the tintype, hidden back of the wash bowl. She had almost forgotten that. She found it, and stood with it in her hands, looking down at the metallic blur of it in the moonlight falling in a shaft from the window. She was almost amused, in a bright, unbitter way, only a little sad, at the inventiveness of life. She decided Providence must take care of fools. Had it been up to her, her love of Jonse would have been too strong for any obligation to duty or convention. But as it was, Providence seemed to have made the refusals she would not have had the strength to; making them quarrel tonight, when quarreling was only a fine point in all the tenderness and yearning and happy thought of him.

She stood looking at the picture of people who loved her, and whom she loved, too. She was not, after all, going away from them. It was only the part of her heart that rightfully belonged to Jonse that had gone away, the woman heart of her to the man who commanded it.

So she had told him, out there at the foot of the path, out of her heart's honesty; honesty all the way around. And remembering that again, she felt almost a release from that abandonment—a liberation, a greater strength for going back. She was going back, still to keep herself to herself, so far as the rest of the world was concerned, and to consider herself lucky. Not many women had that much knowledge of love to keep to themselves—and nothing so rich as that was ever really kept; it spread out into all living and gave its richness, there, too.

She put the picture in her pocket, not to forget it again. She took off the white dress slowly, finding, even as she

hung it up to wear back tomorrow—definitely, finally how much that part of her belonged to Jonse, no matter how impossible it ever would be now to do anything about it.

She knew it with a futility as she lay down to sleep, her last night in this house, not a sad futility particularly now, just a futility, because tomorrow she was going on more fully than ever with her other life, in which Jonse had no place. Except to give it spring, to give it fire.

For a while she had been tired unto death because she thought that had gone from her—the strange lack of luster that comes when there is no longer anything to fight against, as she had fought against that fire; when she had not needed to fight against it because it wasn't there any more. But now she knew it *was* there. It was there, not physical; the possibility of physical contact was put away. It was just an intrinsic need of him.

How long it would take her to get away from the thought of him, she did not know; away from this strong need, the point toward which she had been going forever, it seemed to her. She always had needed him. She always would. She knew now that would be a part of her life forever.

And still so much lay ahead in the way of proving each other. Which was a strange way to be thinking, when nothing lay ahead.

It was like a hot plow with iron points, plowing up deep through her chest, until the slow tears that had been held back in soberness too deep for tears, started. They were steady tears that fell at first so slowly they cooled on her cheeks with a sound to the pillow. She went to sleep to slow crying, and woke up sobbing.

There is a fullness to a night of tears, a dull swollen ache of mind and body, a little sweet, like the earth's fertile swollenness after rain.

The house, with no one in it but herself, was very still as Roseanna dressed to go back. Once she went to the window. A wind was blowing outside, surprisingly soft, for how strong it was. Sometime very recently it had rained, and would again. The hill path, when she looked, like everything else had taken it. But it lay quiet, more a part of the brown earth than she had ever seen it before.

She looked down at her ring. In the darkness of the morning part of the gold had a strange brightness, as though from some hidden light in this day, and the scrolls in shadow were deep. She lifted her hand closer, and looked at it again, as she always could, with new joy; and this time, looking at it closely, down to its intricate last detail, it was a perfect thing.

Unexpectedly, while she was combing her hair, he came. She heard him, and rushed to let him in, in her gladness bumping into a chair and sending it down with a clatter. But at her hurry to come to him, and her awkwardness, she heard Jonse laugh. She flung open the door. His greeting was soberly light.

"That's why I can't get along without you, Roseanna. You do such damn fool things."

For a minute Roseanna could find no words. The rightness of his arms said all there was to say. Then she said, into his shoulder, tensely,

"Let's don't ever hurt each other again, Jonse. Let's don't ever hurt each other!"

"No, I don't think we will, Roseanna."

She looked up, smiling a little, wryly. "I'll be so good, Jonse—I'll go back across the Tug, and you can have your mountain, and I'll promise I won't think of you every second. I'll do anything you say."

He went over and picked up the chair, set it straight, and stirred the fire. For a while the noise of the bellows emptying and filling again, the beginning of the crackle of flame were the only sounds in the room. When he looked up, there was that twist to his mouth, but his eyes were steady.

"We may not have licked the world yet," he admitted. "Maybe nobody ever quite does. But when we go out of it," he said definitely, "we're agoin' to have had a lot of fun tryin' it."

Roseanna smiled wistfully. "Right now wouldn't be a bad time. Although maybe we ought to stay around and see that not too much of that lumber gets sold out to Logan."

He gave that abrupt, impatient toss of his head. "And I'm not sure how important that is, either. Yes I am," he contradicted. "I found out last night. You're the only thing in the world I give a good goddamn about, Roseanna—and that's the truth."

Roseanna had to turn suddenly away, for the tears that were coming. She stood with her head high, against them, while she asked, "What have you got it in head to do, Jonse?"

"We're pullin' out of these mountains," he sounded weary of them, sick of them. "If I'd had any sense, that's what we'd have done in the first place. We'd have headed right on across the county line. We've tried it here," he said grimly. "That's one thing we can check off."

Roseanna drew up a breath, that came out in a long, tearing quiver, and turned to him.

"That's what you think now, Jonse. But if we left these mountains, like this, we'd go with nothin' to do with. And you wouldn't be happy just doin' any kind of work. You're not made that way." An incidental thought came back, that made her smile a little, at the restless bigness of him as he paced the room now. "It would take a big house for you."

He looked at her in surprise, annoyed. "What the hell has that got to do with it?"

"A lot. And I'd like to make a beautiful house for you, you don't know how much. But it would have to be in these mountains, Jonse. You belong here, the same as me."

Almost more than she, he belonged here. And there was some force to the particular piece of them he had chosen as his that called out to some force within himself. To be near it, thinking about that mountain, planning for its success, the plans growing as his experiences grew, would be a release to him. Even for all he had said about her being the only thing that meant anything to him, she knew that was not altogether true. "I go there to *work*," he had said dryly. He needed that, too, to partially satisfy something in his passionate nature

"You'd always be thinkin' about the ideas you'd left behind here—and about your father." She could even talk about Anse now.

He was silent for a moment. "Yes, I suppose I would be thinkin' about them. But we'd come back someday, Roseanna, when the trouble's settled down. Right now, we'd only keep it stirred up. Both your father and mine make things harder for themselves and us than they need to. But they couldn't get as mad a second time. And in the

meantime," he said definitely, "we've found our own way of doin' things, and we're goin' to be stubborn as hell about it!"

Suddenly, Roseanna laughed. For the first time since she had come here she laughed out loud. "Jonse, let's just start out, and follow fall around the world!" She looked at him, in concern. "Or would you a rather to follow spring?"

He considered. "Spring, I guess," he decided. "Spring's exciting, like you."

She drew a deep breath, this time for their ways together that even when they sounded like cymbals, underneath were solid rock.

"Get me some breakfast," Jonse ordered. "I can't plan Big Things on an empty stomach."

Roseanna laughed again, but glanced at the door anxiously.

"They won't be back till noon, or past," he assured her. "Uncle Ellison's pa's favorite brother—and they've likely been gatherin' all the wool in the fields and the cotton too, all night. And what if they do come back?" he demanded.

Half laughing, half crying, Roseanna held him tight as he took her in his arms again. Her hands, convulsively on his shoulders, felt their framework; the reassuring hardness of them, as though their frame were molded from the strength of strong stock. She felt almost grateful to Anse for that heritage that had come down to Jonse, but more, as he held her strongly, for the warmth that was something of his own. She sighed, relaxing in his arms, and all her fears were gone.

"I love you!"

"You don't know what love is," he scoffed. "You only peck at it. It doesn't rack you like it does me."

She looked up, half wryly teasing then. "Man-woman love?"

"Oh sure," he said impatiently. "But more than that." Then he went on sincerely, meaning it, trying to tell her. "You're sweet, and so damned pretty, and so worth while—"

And the teasing went out of her, and she listened chastenedly, humbly, wonderingly; wondering at the grace given her. You could go through a degrading experience, but the faith of someone in you can pull you back up again.

"I thought of you five thousand times last night," he was telling her. "I missed you. Funny, when you've never been in it, but that was a lonely house of mine last night, without you."

Roseanna closed her eyes a second. When she opened them, she could scarcely see him through the blur.

"Nobody else in the world, after last night, could make a mornin' like this—" without bitterness or sharpness, but with a fullness that was more true. "You're good, Jonse."

"Yeah," he gave a short, mirthless laugh. "I'm a dandy." His eyes narrowed, as with something he could not make out. "You loved me even last night, didn't you? You're the only thing I've ever had," he told her, huskily, "that I couldn't figure out. The only thing," he amended, "I've ever had."

Roseanna smiled brokenly, and he pushed her hair back from her temples, gently. "I've always wanted to see you with your hair all soft around your face like this. Know how I finally got to sleep last night? Pretendin' you were there beside me. I could almost feel you there."

"I know—" she whispered.

He kissed her again, with wanting, but with dearness in

it now, too. Then he stood in the doorway and watched while she combed her hair. And breakfast on the rebound turned out to be a lightminded scramble with both of them enjoying it, and each other.

The first swallow of coffee was so hot and tasted so just—good, Roseanna said impulsively, “Coffee’s good! Lots of good things in the world.”

Jonse looked at her. “Sure,” he said dryly. “It’s full of ’em.”

Nevertheless she was lucky to have someone like Jonse, sitting across from her, to make her chuckle. “We’ve had a good time this mornin’.”

To this he agreed, although he said, almost regretfully of the quick way it was passing, “We’re sure goin’ through it in a hurry.”

Roseanna sobered. “What are you plannin’ to do, when we leave?”

“I can always get a job runnin’ blockade.”

She shook her head quickly. That was all different now. “I’d be worried about you. You might get in trouble.”

“Honey, I couldn’t possibly get in any more trouble than I do with you.”

She smiled a little. “Maybe you could get some loggin’ to do.” The idea picked up, and brightened. “And pretty soon you could start in for yourself!”

Behind the tiredness of Jonse’s eyes too, a light came, from some store of vitality of his own. “Whole damned country must be full of forests—”

The idea threw out scope. They ate rapidly, planning, visualizing, catching in one another’s eyes the excitement of the world opening up before them. If the warring wouldn’t let them realize their dreams in their own coun-

try, they'd take their dreams where there wasn't any warring. And when Roseanna dropped the heavy, empty grits bowl as she was clearing away, with more mind to excited other things, Jonse noticed it casually.

"The first jarrin' note of the day."

But it wasn't very jarring, because as she started to gather up the pieces, exasperated, he pulled her to her feet, easily, and said, with that lightness of touch with its strength of hold,

"The hell with it. I'll buy you a silver one, with a servant."

She laughed, glad about more than his assurance that there would be a silver bowl; they always had good times together, when they were let alone, but each thing as it came, added. Jonse looked at her, all at once anxious.

"But it'll be plain livin' for a while."

"That's all right."

"But I'd want to buy you things." He walked away, impatiently, almost angry, and came back. "And you ought to have 'em! I'd take a deal of pride and pleasure in buyin' you pretty things."

Roseanna lifted her hand, for him to see. "You already have."

Jonse looked at her strangely. "I'm afraid of you, Roseanna."

"Afraid?" He had said that once before.

"I'd be afraid now," he told her quietly, "to ever disappoint you."

And that was strange. Because that was the way she felt about him.

"I'll not be long," he assured her, at the door. "I've got a little money up at the shack I want to get, and some clothes.

Be careful. Don't break anything—" he begged her lightly, holding her with joyous liberty, and throwing back his head and laughing when she said helplessly,

"You!"

Watching him ride up the hill path, she almost called after him, to go with him. She would have liked to have seen that house up there, just once. But someday they would be back.

The idea had been there, but they had seemed to have to try out all the wrong ways to it; to grow desperate, despairing of finding the right one, ever. Then right in the middle of all of it at its worst, when separation had piled up its complications—the way had come. And it was so simple. Just to be together. It was throwing everything else out the window. But they couldn't help that. She felt happy, sure, as she watched him out of sight. This time they would build up something great together, in the small sound everyday things of life at its wholest. There would be plenty of opposition to that still. They were not blind to that, nor even untouched by it; which was why it was something they could do knowingly. It was dangerous, she knew full well, to feel too sure about anything. But this sureness had been a long time emerging, and come now to solid stuff.

She started cleaning up the breakfast things with an almost tangible feeling of the flowing of grace around her. With fullness again—not a satiated fullness, but as though a sure foundation were finally coming, to build on quietly, beautifully.

And in time, when the bad feeling was over with, they would come back—she would want their children to know these mountains. Children. She stood very still. How proud

she would be to bear Jonse's children— And their children would begin at the place of peace and joy they had had to work their way to.

Even the rumbling of a wagon coming did not disturb her too much at first, except to bring her up listening, with a kind of experienced dismay. She ran to the door, to see was Jonse coming—perhaps they still could slip away. There was no sign of Jonse. They had thought to let the roiled waters clear, of themselves, with time. But after all, it seemed they would have to take their chance of stirring up Anse's ill humor again.

Her dismay grew, as she saw that Anse had returned already in great anger. The black-bearded clan leader stood up in the wagon, yanking the horses to a stop just inside the yard. He seemed to be gathering himself to strike. He leaped down over the front wheel and started throwing out orders. Roseanna heard them in stunned silence.

Cap and Will, the two boys next to Jonse, were ordered to Matewan for .38 and .44 Winchesters; to clean the place out of ammunition, and buy any Colts that were to be had. The two boys looked at each other with a grim exultation in their eyes. The littler boys, scared and excited, Anse sent to key houses through the hills, with the word for Hatfields to be on the ready. They set off at a lively rate, important.

Levisa, looking big and meaningless, was dully shooing the little girls out of the way. Roseanna flew to meet her.

"Miss Levisa, what's happened?"

"Anse just heard at Ellisons' that the McCoy's are fixin' to ride." It was a flat, shadeless statement. Levisa went on by.

Roseanna stood blankly, seeing all their plans, all their dreams, all their happiness emptying out. They had been going to leave, to stop the trouble. But the trouble was starting anyway. Guns were coming out. Men were expecting to shoot at men. And anger came, of her own. It was different from the outraged emotion of last night. It had the clarity of justified anger, a sense of unbinding; a release from self-consciousness without false consideration. There was a kind of glory in it, which she was not conscious of, any more than one would be conscious of fetters unloosed to let one stride against the enemy, the enemy being the one thing in intent. Yet she had the consciousness of freely striding toward Anse. She met him face to face, not afraid of him now.

"You don't know what you're doin'! You're makin' trouble for a lot of people who shouldn't have trouble. You're spoilin' things you don't even know about. Jonse and I could tell you, if you'd listen. And he *will* tell you!"

For the second time since she had come into that house, Anse looked at her directly. He still did not see her. The hatred of the years was burning hot in those black eyes.

"I didn't start this trouble. But since it's started, I'm ready." Ready like an old field for the touch of fire. "Anybody who comes onto my property, threatenin' one of my children, invites quick death."

Facts mounted raw and ugly. Somehow news of how she had been staying here had got to her family, and they were taking out their fury on Jonse. She stood staring at Anse, knowing that if harm came to Jonse because of her, anything else in the world would be less than the dust of a road she walked unseeing.

Levisa was coming heavily back, for one last try. Jonse

was her first-born, the fruit of her body. Levisa's wallowing body, under the black dress, looked dull too, dull with the portent of hurt.

"Captain Anderson, if you'd let these youngun's marry, it would stop this trouble. You can't fault her for the McCoys acomin'—"

But the lord of war was too busy now to worry about what had started the trouble—it was started; he was making the best plans he could. He went on toward the house.

"She's not taken a crooked step—" pleaded Levisa.

At that Anse turned back. He slightly raised one shaggy brow, and a peculiar smile came to his eyes.

"She allowed herself to be took in the first place, didn't she?"

With a cry Roseanna ran. She had never hated anyone as she hated Anse Hatfield. She loathed and detested and despised him. He wasn't satisfied to destroy their dreaming; that wasn't enough for him. He had to take something rare and good and cheapen and spoil it, and make it common.

The falling of her heart grew more acute—the falling of all the joy and trust in life pulled down by something that for her had been fine. Her hatred of him grew more sorrow, than anything to strike back with.

It had turned such a dark and sad day, with everything ending. Even the use of trying. She had been walking in hot blindness and found herself at the foot of the hill path. There was a heaviness to her eyelids as she looked up at it, as though she were looking back. The sadness like a sickness in her had a heaviness, too. But she knew, as she stood there, it was not the end of trying. It was only the beginning.

She started up the path, to Jonse. She was bewildered by what she had brought about. It all only had been along a

stumbling road to some goal set in her in the beginning. She had followed it—followed it to her hurt, and now to the threatened hurt of all the people in the world she would not hurt; the ones at home, and Jonse.

The path topped a rise, and went down a ways before it started up again. A childish voice came low. Roseanna started. That was Little Randall's voice!

"I'm here, in the scrub."

"What are you doin' here?" She ran to the clump of scrub oak. What worse news could he be bringing?

"I'm scoutin' from the Hatfields—" He grinned at her. "Waitin' for a chance to see you. I come in behind their lines." He was gleeful at the success of his ruse.

Roseanna could have laughed and she could have cried then, at sight of that wild, loved, funny little mug peering at her from around a horse's head, through the cover of oak branches. She longed to take him in her arms, feel the way he sometimes let her, looking up at her solemnly. She needed this little brother, to take a little comfort, and give a little. But she held back, away from him. She had forfeited her right to that. Anse had made her know that.

"Come here," Little Randall beckoned her closer impatiently.

Roseanna tried, but she could not.

At this silent withholding, after he had come all this way to see her, and feeling something wrong between them, the child slid off the horse in worry and came to her.

"What's the matter, Roseanna? What have I done?"

What have you done? Oh, Little Randall, it's what I've done, not you!

"I just come to tell you," he said anxiously, "that the boys are ridin' tonight—" He stopped, in embarrassment,

and blurted, "I figured maybe you'd come home with me—then you wouldn't run no chance of gettin' hurt."

She gathered him to her, holding him tight. "Oh, Little Randall—Little Randall—"

He cuddled against her, almost comfortably for a moment. Roseanna's hold of him grew lax. She drew a long sigh.

"I was comin' home anyway."

Little Randall looked up at her with joy, with his faith in her vindicated. "I *knowed* you'd not stay here to lay up with trash!"

Roseanna moved slowly away a few steps, and looked on up the path. Fog and clouds were hanging low and drifting. But a piece of sun she could not see must be somewhere, because while she stood looking at the path, the fields with their weeds and shrub on either side of it stayed dark, but the path was in sun.

She had thought Anse had taken something fine that happens once in a lifetime between a man and woman and made it common. But he hadn't. He might change the course of it, but he couldn't spoil it. It was still there! She came back to Little Randall and talked quickly, with sober life to it.

"There's somethin' I've got to do. I'll take the horse, so I won't be gone long. You stay here."

"You'll come back and go home with me?" he quizzed narrowly.

"I'll come back and go home with you," she told him sadly. Then, he looked so little, "You sure you'll be all right?"

"Huh!" he scoffed. "I got into this viper's nest all right, didn't I?"

Roseanna tousled his hair gravely. "I don't reckon even the Hatfields would hurt a little boy."

He bristled. "I'm not so damned little!"

Roseanna smiled at that. "I know you're not. But you stay right here in the scrub," she told him definitely.

She took the horse and went on. She rode up the path she had looked to so many times, but never gone before. The fields it went through were high grown with their own weedy ripeness. The rain from the night stayed in the damp of shaded places along the way, but the path itself was harder, drying in the wind. But she could tell the rain in the night had been strong. The path was gutted. The rain had ripped it and left it open.

It went on up a steeper way, into Jonse's world. She rode with a strange openness to it, as something to see once, and keep. Jonse had said it was wild country, and he was right.

It was still a dark day, but she was high enough now to look out and over, and there were variations in the dark, and it was beautiful. The bleak dark beautiful big swelling earth, with the frenzy of oaks in the threatening storm, like the frenzy of giants. Far away a fog lay resting, white and still, between blue-black mountains that spread out before her, to the end. And above was the calm strength of the peak of this mountain that was mighty, from the inside out. Looking up, she knew the power Jonse felt here—the deep power and peace.

The mountain grew known to her smaller ways. There was a pause in its ascent, and it leveled. This was Jonse's pine forest. She was nearing the cabin now; the faint sweetness of smoke drifted into the freshness of the winds. This was Jonse's pine forest, and Roseanna knew she could have

lived here in pride and died in dignity. Her own wide world reachings which she had felt vaguely, and even the ones she and Jonse had visioned at breakfast, suddenly, peacefully, would not have mattered a whit. It would have been a matter of serene indifference to her whether or not they ever saw any more of the world. The world lay around them; the wide world circled them.

And then she saw the cabin itself, in a small clearing for it ahead. Its log sides were made from the trees that had given it place, and its gray stone chimney was piled from rocks at hand. "Not much of a place," Jonse had said—and in truth, it was not. But it had been place enough for the experience of their dreaming. It was a careless little house, but it had been house enough to have taken care of itself, and them, during these experimental days together; these rich days, these days crowded with life. No little house ever had had more of it, and no two people happier in their dreaming than she and Jonse there.

The tears sprang, traitors to reality, and had to be pushed back with a kind of furious, weary patience; weary at having to explain again and again that dreams were being put away; discouraged at her stupidity in having to be reminded.

Jonse came to the door. Intent upon his own leave-taking he did not at once hear the approach of the horse through the soft loam. Roseanna watched him as he turned for one last look into the house, to see that everything was done; that he had forgotten nothing. The broad brim of his hat was cocked at an angle, and a sprig of pine was stuck in its brim for the occasion. The knowledge that he was all her joy and pain; the love of him, crowded her chest and hurt.

Jonse closed the door to the house she had seen, but now

would never enter. He started toward the horse, that was ready, the saddlebags bulging. He lifted a boot to the stirrup, started to swing up, and saw her coming. A mixture of gladness and concern crossed his face. He leaped down, and strode to meet her.

Roseanna steeled herself. She must not let herself give the truth away. She must not. No men, nor set of men, could turn Jonse from his course now. She knew it. He would not now admit the despair of the whole problem that was too big for them. He would go down fighting it—he would go down. She watched him coming toward her with the stillness such as faces life and death.

“What brings you here?” He was anxious. “Is there somethin’ wrong, dear?”

Roseanna dropped her eyes. She could not look into his, as he said that, and keep to her purpose. And her eyes’ faltering would lend conviction to what she had come to say.

“Jonse,” she began, with a difficulty which at least was not false, “I’ve been thinkin’, since you left.” She looked up ruefully for a second. “I can’t seem to think when you’re near me.” And that, too, was the truth. “But when we’re apart, I can think again.

“Sometimes,” she said, her voice very low, “it takes a long time to know.”

Though it had been in her bone, it had taken time to know that faith in him was the construction of her whole inward life. It was the deepness of it there that could give the rest of life its happiness, its lightness, its buoyancy. She never had known it so much as she made the denial of it, not looking at him, for she could not have, and said it. He was watching her, in unbelief, waiting.

"It wouldn't ever work, Jonse. We thought it would for a while this mornin'. But we've hurt each other too much. The chance again wouldn't be worth it."

She could feel his sharp drawing back. And feigning it, finding the words new to her, they came hard, torn, convincing.

"We'd never really trust each other, after all that's happened. I'd never have the feelin' I could—quite count on you—"

She could not go on, and slowly, finally, turned back to him. The straightness of that dark gaze, the sureness gone from it by hurt; the hurt of the mouth, the cynical hurt. The hurt to pride. She looked back, out of her own pride in him. Her body burned with the burn of cold; she grew weak; there was an icy hole in the middle of her chest bone. Her breath sucked back convulsively; her mind went blindly blank as she said, not "I love you." That would be too simple, too direct, and the world was not letting it be that way for them. She said,

"I don't know what else to say, Jonse."

His answer was bitter, self-mocking. "You've said a great deal, Roseanna."

"Then, good-by."

"Good-by." It was tight and cold.

Roseanna rode back with her tears walled up within her. Little Randall climbed on in front of her and took the reins.

"Go straight through the yard," she told him indifferently. Little Randall looked wild, but he did it.

At the sound of the horse coming into the yard, Anse came to the door quickly. At the sight of another one, a

boy, his shaggy brows drew over his eyes. Roseanna let him worry. Something was happening to her with Anse. She was finding, after so much turmoil and sickness of mind and heart he had caused her, she was having a hard time remembering he was there. His presence didn't mean much as she passed. It was scarcely consequential.

"You can rest your guns, Anse." She did not bother to stop to tell him. She merely sent it after her as she went through. "I'm leavin'."

What Anse thought of his house finally being cleansed of strangers, or if he thought at all, she did not know. She did not look back.

Little Randall was jubilant. "You brushed him off just like he was an old horsefly!" He looked up at his sister in admiration, and licked the horse to a gallop, taking a vicious glee in the dirt that the hoofs threw up behind them.

Where the Hatfield lane turned into the general dirt road, they saw the plodding approach of a horse, with the slight, black-hatted, black-coated figure of Uncle Dyke astride. They pulled up, as they drew alongside. The preacher was surprised at their paths crossing thus.

"I looked to see you up at the house, Roseanna."

"I'm aleavin', Uncle Dyke."

He looked at her keenly. "Now that's too bad." He smiled a little. "I'd kindly had it in mind, while I was up this way, to do a little marryin'."

Roseanna's lips parted, because of an oppression in her that would not let her breathe.

Little Randall answered for her, contemptuously, by spitting off to one side. Uncle Dyke sat with his hands thoughtfully on the saddle horn. They were the hands

Roseanna had watched from childhood. But suddenly, it was Jonse's hands she was seeing in her mind, taking their fine shape and tender touch.

"We'd best get on, Little Randall—" All at once Roseanna did not want Uncle Dyke to say anything more. She could not have stood up under those kindly eyes seeing through to good, that many, looking at it from the outside, would not call good.

But the brief encounter brought her presently a lulling kind of peace. They had said there would be no peace for them. Although they had found there could be. But it had been too deep to be lulling. Now the peace that came was like a strength—a strength that would let her endure renunciation.

She traveled back over the road she had come in so happily with Jonse, seeing by gray day the places they had passed by moonlight. They entered the woods road, that led through a valley, twisting and winding. The glow of the laurel was dulled; the pines still had some shine to them, but it was an old shine, kept with effort. A day at the end of summer, after a long sapping dry spell, with the rain last night not enough. The brown trail they had followed that night with such mystery to it, looked dull too; tired, worn. The air that stirred the woods today was soft winded; not soft like the cheek of youth, but soft like a fine shawl.

She had felt wondering as she had ridden this road with Jonse. And despite her sadness, she felt so again. It was a sober, swelling gratitude that she had been allowed to know what love was, even though she could not have it; that she had been allowed to know that much, and still keep the others safe.

As the way finally came out of the valley woods and climbed on up around to the high piece of mountain road Jonse and she had taken so recklessly, she felt almost tranquil. But even in her acceptance now, of going back; of there being no future ever, for them to look forward to—in her acceptance of life without him, Jonse was still there. She would wake up in the middle of something Little Randall was saying, thinking about him. There was no desperation in it: he was just there.

As the road dropped down, nearing the Tug, she noticed an old schoolhouse off to one side, which she had not seen in the excitement of her passing it with Jonse. She noticed it for its deserted appearance. It stood at an angle, and seemed about to give way. The wall of one side leaned decidedly in, while the wall of the other leaned out. One big oak tree stood in the desolate clearing, with a hard arm over the building.

They went on, and presently were splashing across the Tug. The rally field was deserted; and so was the store yard. The idling crowd had not gathered yet. There was just one old man, and the storekeeper. The old man glanced sideways at Roseanna, startled, and put a thin hand to his mouth, against the weather that was coming; an old man afraid of life, and afraid of death.

The store was dirty gray in the sunless day. Storekeeper Davis, lounging in the doorway, looked up, in surprise it seemed to Roseanna, as they passed; with the surprise tempered by disappointment. She was almost amused. If there had been war, he could have done business. He could have sold the applejack to give it spur, and the guns to keep it going. Being the local coffinmaker, he could have used the crates the guns came in to bury the victims. Times, when

Uncle Dyke was away tending the several remote mountain churches in his charge, Storekeeper Davis did the preaching. Roseanna had heard it said once, if the fee were big enough, he'd send anybody to the city of their fathers with a crown big as a bucket. Yes, Storekeeper Davis could have done about a one hundred per cent business, if she were not coming home.

They went through the town, with its funny little square cut houses with their mixed up little lives trying so futilely to fit in. They went past her cousin Zinny's house, sitting in huddled hoveltry close to the road.

At the forks, they turned up their own and came to the church house hill and Roseanna said suddenly, "Stop, Little Randall. I want to go up there a minute."

Little Randall, who long ago had given up trying to talk to her because she seemed so far away, but who kept turning around to look at her moodily, was astonished at anybody wanting to go to church when they didn't have to.

"It ain't Sunday!"

"I know—" But she had climbed that hill before when it wasn't Sunday. That had been the day after the Racoon Hollow affair, when she had gone inside the little church and knelt at the back slab bench, in desperation and faith—without knowing what to pray for exactly; just having in her mind that look of fear in her mother's and Bess's eyes, and the blackness in her father's. She had felt no answer to her prayer that day, but remembered now that when she had looked up, the sky had been very blue through the window holes, the sun had been shining and the wind blowing. Someone, who had remembered the churches from the places the mountain people had first come from, had made the windows of that little log church in the wilderness

high and pointed. They had looked like praying hands. That day when she had come before, she had been pure, and desirous somehow of wanting to help.

Now she climbed the hill to the little church house because she needed to feel some presence of God, some closeness; not for herself; but a sign this time her prayer would be answered, that those others not be punished for anything she had done.

The door was closed. For the first time in her life Roseanna found the church door closed against her. She tried it, but it was locked.

She sat down on the top steps, thinking, accepting it almost philosophically. She looked forward to condemnation of the present and to hell hereafter with a kind of calmness that came from inward, not purity exactly—purity was too thin, too un-lived to do much good; but now more a truth to some lofty aim.

The doors of the church were closed against her, after the doors of life had opened. She looked at the gravestones around the church, and wondered what would be on hers. Then she thought it wouldn't matter if nothing at all were. It only mattered that she be of some use now, to the people who were still here.

Maybe, maybe that was a part of the Plan; that she go through failures and shames so she could know how truly good then, the sweet and pure things were. All that wealth of life must have been granted her for some reason—

Little Randall was calling to her impatiently, and she hurried down to him, deciding to give all the warmth she had learned she was capable of to these she had disappointed once, but now was coming back to. As they started on, she made a positive start in that direction.

"How's the puppy?"

It was the first direct interest she had shown about coming home, almost the first thing she had said at all. And that it should have been about his puppy, the little boy responded happily.

"La, Roseanna, he's growed even since you left. Remember how we laughed when he took a flyin' leap at the doorstone, missed, and landed on his nose? Now he goes up it just as easy—and it's high, too," he said proudly.

"That's nice," she said, absently.

And the next moment the calm she had thought she had come to, that peace, that rest she had thought she had found in renunciation—that sound sadness her life seemed to have settled to—was broken, as from a violence. She sat behind Little Randall with her hands in her hair, her whole body rocking back and forth with dry sobbing.

Little Randall turned on her fiercely, his eyes full of fury and pity as he looked at her. "Them Hatfields got plenty comin' to 'em for this!"

Roseanna straightened, in alarm. "Don't talk like that, Little Randall. I got no reason to cry. I'm just tired, I reckon."

And suddenly her fatigue was an alarming thing. She had a strange experience. She felt so lightheaded she had to hold onto the saddle sides; and then her hands felt enormous and of some tremendous unbearable weight pulling her down. She sat up quickly. She could not face her family like this.

"You look plumb awful," Little Randall told her bluntly, bitterly. "You look like you been body beat." His grubby hands tightened on the reins, his head went straight and

his teeth clenched. "If they so much as laid a hand on you, I'll break their damned necks for 'em."

Roseanna smiled a little at that, at his fierceness, and put her hands reassuringly on his shoulders—just narrow shoulders yet, but broad enough to have taken the responsibility of coming for her, that she would not get hurt.

"Now guile down! Of course nobody mistreated me while I was there. This is just a grown-up somethin' that happened. And now it's over with, and we're goin' to forget it."

But Little Randall could not forget it. Even as the puppy yipped wildly at sight of its master coming into the yard, and made a roaring tour in its joy and excitement, and came to jump up on the boy, waggling ridiculously, Little Randall pushed him away furiously.

"Get down, before I run you through!"—and then stooped quickly and gathered the puppy hard in his arms for a second, burying his face in its coat.

Roseanna went on toward the house. She approached it with the attempt to apply her philosophical decision here that she had made on the way down the church house hill. But she had used it once, with Little Randall, and it was harder now—after that unexpected wanting of Jonse again. It lacked force.

Her mother was out back, feeding the chickens. But at sight of Roseanna, she gave a cry of thankfulness. She let her apronful of meal drop in a heap, and came to meet her daughter, her arms outstretched. Roseanna stumbled into them, and clung to her, silently.

"Roseanna—" Sarie held her tight. "Oh Roseanna—" Then she put her at arm's length away from her, and looked

into the girl's eyes. And Sarie, who was a gentlewoman, got a look of sheer savagery on her face, as though she could beat to a pulp a world that would so hurt her child.

"What have they done, Roseanna? What have they done to you—"

The whole idea of trying to explain was suddenly a trouble to Roseanna. She was weary of the effort before she was started.

"They didn't do anything to me," she said tiredly. "And I didn't do anything I didn't want to do."

There was a baffled silence. Then her mother said, as the one thing she could get hold of, "Well you're home, and that's the important thing. Are you sure you're all right though? You look so peaked."

Roseanna had not thought much about how she looked, but it must be sorry, if both her mother and Little Randall said so. She followed her mother on into the house, in trepidation, trying to brace herself for the storm there would be forthcoming from Old Randall, and feeling completely incapable of meeting it.

Old Randall was sitting in a straight-backed chair by the fire when she went in. He did not look up. He said nothing. He just sat there, like an old man. This was something she had not considered. She was not prepared for it; that tall, straight figure she had left—now the proud back bent, the head low, looking at nothing. She went to him, almost fiercely, and knelt beside him.

Old Randall looked up. "Roseanna! I didn't hear you come in." A flash of gladness came to the face. "I was scared you wouldn't come—but I might have knowed you would—" He did a thing unusual for him. He laid his hand

on her head, and Roseanna dropped her face to his knees.

And something of that rest with which she had made the first part of the ride home, returned.

There was a flat gentleness to her father's hand, that hurt her more than had he railed. It amazed her now that she could even ever have thought of deserting her duty to him. That was the rest that came—after the greatest turbulence she had ever known. The other was over and done for, like a fever that had reached its highest pitch; a pain that had got its worst and then dropped, and eased. She felt a leveling off, a quieting down, the return of the will to health again, its constructiveness strengthened under that hand, the obsession with pain easing.

She had come back to someone who needed her, come back to someone who was tired too and whose burden was great. And she almost had not come back. Remembering that, for an instant she felt blank, baffled, knowing only stubbornly she had followed some gleam, that had led her into strange ways—wrong ways, weak ways. But if she had lost her own soul along the way, if she had relinquished the wholeness of happiness—one thing had stayed. The good ones, the fine ones, were to stay happy. And Jonse was in that, too—it all lined up together.

And coming back because of that, she found oddly, for herself, under her father's hand, a place of refuge, a stay of strength, a covert from storm.

The hand fell from her slowly, and she looked up. Her father was coming to his feet and she came to hers. He stood looking at her—a wan, mortally tired girl, in a jaded white dress. His fists clenched, till the white knuckles seemed held together by iron rods.

"What did they do," he hurled his whole sorrow, his whole hatred of his enemy, at her, "make a plaything of you, and then throw you out?"

Roseanna closed her eyes for a second in final futility.

"No, they didn't throw me out. I come of my own free will." Her weariness blazed, with sudden spirit. "And I went of my own free will! Can't any of you see that—" she wheeled, to appeal to her older brothers, Phamer and Tolbert and Jim, who had come in silently. "I went with Jonse because I loved him—can't any of you understand that?"

Old Randall McCoy looked at his daughter at that, as though on some abomination, who had done something evil, polluting his house.

"I hate Anse Hatfield as much as you would ever dare to," Roseanna tried, in despair, to tell him. "But Jonse is different—he's a fine person—"

Her father made a sound of bitterness, and looked at her, at her sadness. "He pears to have made you very happy."

Phamer went over to the scuttle hole, and got down the jug and drank. But there was no pleasantness to the drinking. He drank as though the fiery corn liquor was strong bitter to him. Roseanna turned to Tolbert—his mouth was straight, there was no flashing smile. And Jim—the quiet one, with the level head—had his eyes lowered, darkly. Allifair had stolen in to stand close beside her mother, her gaze round with things she did not know. The easy, lazy ways of this house were gone.

It seemed a negative renunciation she had made. Roseanna turned, with the uselessness of all of it, toward her own room.

Her mother, not understanding either, but wanting to, said softly, "Wait, Roseanna—let's talk about this."

At the doorway Roseanna turned, looking like a bewildered child. "By now I'm so mixed up I wouldn't know what to talk about."

She went through to the boys' room, and opened her own door, and went in. The room was exactly as she had left it. The same faint light lift of fragrance came to greet her. But it was not light enough to lift her heart.

She went to the mirror and looked at her reflection. It came back to her indifferent as a ghost. Indifferently she sat down on the edge of the bed and started taking off her shoes.

The door opened softly, and Bess came in, compassionately. Without a word she went to the bed and took the younger girl in her arms.

"Bess, it all would have worked out if they'd just have let us alone. But pa don't understand, any more than Anse did."

"Someday, Roseanna," promised Bess, "they will. And you'll see Jonse again."

At Bess's voice so warm, so sorry, Roseanna got up abruptly, and went over to the window, and stood staring out, and then turned, smiling at Bess, unsteadily.

"Maybe I can tell you, Bess. I don't seem to be able to, with the others. But this dress you gave me—maybe it wasn't exactly a weddin' dress. But no weddin' dress was ever worn more happily."

Bess was finding difficulty in answering. "It's yours, Roseanna. I told you that, in the first place."

Roseanna looked down at it, and half lifted her hand, remembering.

"He gave me a ring, Bess—" At the remembrance of all it meant, her joy in it made her beautiful for a moment. Her eyes narrowed with an odd mixture of spiritualness and sensuousness; her face somehow took on a delicate, cherished look.

Then she came to Bess swiftly, in anxiety. "There won't be any trouble now, will there?"

"I don't see why," said her sister-in-law. "Now that you're home." She put her hand, with a heartfelt relief of her own, over Roseanna's. "And I'm sure glad you are, without the boys havin' to go fetch you! Without Old Randall holdin' 'em down— Let's don't talk about it—" said Bess suddenly, resolutely.

But Roseanna was looking at her wonderingly. "Pa wasn't aimin' to ride with 'em?"

Bess shook her head. "I don't reckon he even knowed what they were plannin' to do. He hasn't seemed to hear anything that's been said to him, since he heard about you."

Roseanna sat silent.

"Don't you see, Roseanna," Bess tried to make her understand, "you've always been somebody kindly different—somebody special to him. To all of 'em," she said. "But I've watched your father when you'd walk in a room, and it would be like fresh air comin' in. And then, to have you come home this way—" She broke off. "But he'll see how it is, come time," she said, with the promise of solace. But Roseanna remembered what Jonse had said.

"Time goes so fast—" And now they were late.

Her mother came in, turning to push the door further open with her body, both hands full; a plate of food in one, and a glass of foamy buttermilk in the other.

"Bess," she said, "the baby's awake, and thinkin' he's

been good as long as he can stand it. He was puckerin' up when I peeked in at him—and Phamer's gone."

Bess and Roseanna darted glances of quick anxiety at each other, with Bess voicing it. "Where'd he go?"

"Just down to the store," said Sarie, with the same relief both the younger women felt. "With Tolbert and Little Randall. I reckon they just couldn't sit around. Jim took the dogs, to walk it off. And Randall's out at the forge."

Everything seemed on even keel again. The baby was setting up lusty indignation at neglect. "I'm acomin', I'm acomin'," Bess said. "And I'll keep Allifair and t'other youngun's quiet so you can sleep, Roseanna."

"First sensible idea there's been in this house since I fixed you somethin' to eat," said Sarie briskly.

Roseanna had been under such tension these last days she scarcely had known what she'd eaten, if she had—except the breakfast with Jonse. But she ate hungrily now, and found it was good. Her mother looked on with a yearning kind of satisfaction at that much she could do, at least, although she said indignantly,

"Didn't Levisy Hatfield even feed you whilst you were there?"

"She was kind to me," Roseanna said soberly—"as well as she could be."

"Well—" Her mother sighed, perhaps for the wife of the other clan leader as well.

A question came to Roseanna, which had not occurred to her before.

"How did you all hear so quick about—Anse not lettin' us marry?"

"It's a sight how news like that gets around," Sarie sighed. "And pears like everybody in these mountains had wind of

it afore we did. But the peddler stopped at Ellisons' last evening—they were havin' some kind of doin's."

Roseanna nodded.

"And he heard Anse give it out. I don't reckon the peddler realized who it was he was passin' the word on to, when he come on back this way. But you know Zinny—she hears somethin' and starts out."

Sarie took the empty plate and glass, and then stood looking at her daughter, troubled, and troubled for her. She had been biding her time, waiting for the girl herself to open the subject.

"Roseanna," she began.

But Roseanna was sitting tightly still. She didn't know why she should be surprised that it was Zinny who had brought this trouble about and magnified it, except that it struck her afresh that it could be an infuriatingly unfair world. And this added one more thing. Zinny spreading gossip like wildfire about the McCoy leader. It might be Roseanna who had caused it, but she was the leader's daughter. And what had Zinny ever contributed to the clan? A woman with a small mean mind, who kept unfortunate visitors awake by nagging at a harassed husband, whose son had left home because he couldn't stand it, and who had an odd daughter. That's what she had contributed. And she had started scandal about the daughter of the head of the clan. Old Randall had done more for everyone of the name than anyone ever would—and he would be the one talked about. Zinny, getting the talk going around out of sheer jealousy and malice for the good he *did* do.

Roseanna felt sorry for informers, considered the lowest of the low, if they were despised as much as she was scorning the poor old hanger-on who so eagerly would

trade on the trouble and confusion of others for some notice to herself. She wished Zinny were there that minute.

She could imagine Zinny, her scrawny neck getting red like a turkey's, her ugly skin sagging—falling back and gasping, in injury and indignation. Maybe she could have made the old woman mad enough to leave them alone.

But the next instant she knew she would only have made the gossip mad enough to smear harder at every chance from then on. It was no use jumping a gossip.

And then, she sat in tired wonder at herself. Of all people, she who had so laid herself open to life and knew all the frailties that went with that— And last night she had thought she would be tolerant. She had thought she would remember to feel sorry for the slanderer, because the slanderer's heart would know shame. And at the first opportunity she had been the quickest to condemn.

She could not expect Zinny, any more than the whole countryside—any more than her father and Anse—to understand that what had happened had been fine and beautiful and bigger than she had been able to be. She could not even explain that to her mother, who was so wanting to help. Roseanna felt it sadly, helplessly, because it would only hurt her mother to know that everything she had raised her for was not enough. It occurred to her she could ask none of her loved ones for help. She shrank from the thought of it, in decency; it wouldn't be fair. She started undressing slowly.

Sarie sighed, at Roseanna staying so sealed against her, and closed the shutters, darkening the little room to its own familiar comfort and retreat, and went out, closing the door behind her.

Roseanna lay with her head beginning to feel dull and

utterly useless for thinking of anything beyond the physical comfort and laxness of the moment. Her body sagged with sleep. After two nights of not sleeping, she could feel it soaking in. It was as though her bones, tight and dry and high-strung, were slowly soaking up all the sleep they had missed. She found herself catching on eagerly to oblivion that was coming—it might not last, but while it was there—

She wakened to the sound of rain. When she opened the shutters it was dark, with the day ending, and with the wild dark rain. While she had slept, someone had brought in fresh water, and she washed and put on clean clothes, and was sitting on the bed lacing her shoes, still half groggy from the deepness of the sleep—when it came.

Through the house's quiet came the song: the song she and Jonse had heard together early in the yearning and the hopelessness even then of their love, but in the happiness, too; the song that seemed about them. Allifair was singing it, her childish voice high and sweet. Roseanna had heard it last night in memory, when she and Jonse were quarreling. Was she to hear it everywhere, always? Now, hearing it so unexpectedly, poignant and sad, she felt herself draw up; the old pain at the heart; the old tears start. She sat staring straight ahead, into— What?

She dressed with a sense of depression. She tried to tell herself it was her loneliness, but all the time she was combing her hair she could not get away from a growing feeling of impending tragedy—striking from where she did not know. She found herself listening, and when there came the sound of horse's hoofs, she heard it with a kind of fatality.

It was just one horse coming, the hoofbeats dulled by the rain and the mud. But there was something about them

that took her running to the front of the house. Her father and mother already were standing in the doorway, strained. They stood together against anything that might come. Bess had risen with the baby, holding him tightly. Roseanna stopped on the threshold.

Footsteps came running up over the doorstone, and Jim came in, shaking the wet from his hat and his clothes. Sarie and Old Randall stepped back for him silently. He said briefly, to his father,

"The trouble's started. There's been a fight—"

Sarie made a sound like a cry, and lifted her hands and wrung them. Old Randall grasped Jim's shoulder. His eyes flamed. But he said, in fact-finding portentous control,

"Tell me everything that happened, just as it was. I want to know what happened, so I'll know how to move."

Roseanna stood stark as a spectator.

"The fight," Jim said, "took place just outside the store. It was late afternoon, not the usual breakin' up time, but the boys had been moody. It was right uncomfortable," he said. "Kindly like folks had somethin' to say, and the boys expectin' 'em to say it—but it wasn't anything that could be talked about.

"So the boys were leavin'. But by bad luck they run into Ellison Hatfield, and his brother Lias, who rode up. As Ellison dismounted he said, kindly sneerin', 'What you doin', boys, goin' home to see how the little lark is?' Tolbert knocked him down.

"Ellison come up with a knife, and Tolbert met him." Jim paused, "I'd have parted 'em, but the talkin' was so rough, honor was at stake."

There was not a sound in the room, and he went on.

"Ellison drew first blood, with an overhand flash that

laid Tolbert's skull open. Tolbert closed, and drove his knife into Ellison's side, but he was blinded by the blood in his eyes and hit a rib, doin' no particular damage.

"The fightin' was so close from then on it couldn't be described. Everyone could see Tolbert was gettin' the worst of it, and the feelin' was growin' tight in the crowd that collected. But as luck had it, Ellison slipped, dropped the knife, and Little Randall kicked it out of reach. Ellison got his feet just as Tolbert come in, but Ellison dodged the thrust and grabbed Tolbert around the middle, pinnin' his arms to his sides, and rammin' his head up under Tolbert's chin. He started bendin' Tolbert's head back to break his neck. They grappled some—it was right slippery, and Tolbert was gettin' blue in the face. He let out a horrible groan—his eyes was starin', and all of sudden while I was thinkin' what to do, Little Randall flashed in like a little demon, his knife out. And before we could stop him, he stabbed Ellison. And he kept on stabbin' him!

"It was terrible. Tolbert and Ellison both were in bad shape then. There'd been blood—plenty. But now Ellison's whole back was red. But he hung on. Tolbert's breath was rattlin'. He was about gone. And Phamer took aim and fired—shot Ellison in the back. Ellison fell crossways on Tolbert.

"Somebody must have got word to Anse. He come in ragin'. The constable come to life, arrested Phamer and Little Randall, and Tolbert who was back on his feet, dazed and reelin'. The Hatfields hoisted Ellison to a rigged up stretcher and took him away."

Old Randall, white-faced, said, "And where are the boys?"

"The Hatfields tied 'em up—we were outnumbered—

and took 'em to the old schoolhouse on the other side of the river. There's hell in Anse," finished Jim. "He says if Ellison dies, our boys go with him."

ROSEANNA'S nails crushed into her palms. Her face was ash.

Her mother, whose arms had fallen lengthwise in front of her, the gnarled fingers moving convulsively during Jim's account, groped for a chair.

Bess had stood pale and anxious, but with a steady look followed the course of the fight as it was told. At Phamer's part in it she had gone all at once still. The baby in her arms began to whimper.

"Hush," Bess said. "Hush," she said again, as to some small sound heard irrelevantly while the world grew stranger to her.

Jim had told his father what he needed to know. It brought a change. Old Randall had listened unwaveringly. The force and depth of his passion which before had racked him, did not flare to the old quick flame. It burned inward. The white line of anger around his mouth was like a scar that would never leave. His oath, at Anse's threat, came from the stillest thing in him—his hate grown mortal.

"I'll see him hanged! By hell, I'll have anyone of the name hanged who touches my boys!"

He went for his greatcoat, that he wore in winter and rain. He swung his rifle into the hollow of his arm.

A flinty gratification crossed Jim's dark and stiffened face. His hand tightened on his own gun.

"I'll get the word out," he offered, and paused, confused as his father stopped him with a look.

"I'll get the word out," Old Randall's eyes were fierce, forbidding.

At that Sarie looked up at her husband with a mixture of dependence and fear. "What you fixin' to do?"

His answer came with self-forced restraint. "I'm ridin' to Pikeville, to the prosecutin' attorney."

That it was not the original answer of their kind to the enemy, hot shot or cold steel, a momentary relief came to Sarie's drawn face—and willing question; clutching eagerly at any hope.

"What can he do?"

"He can see that *nothin's* done." The influence with the downstate law the mountain clansman had begun to taste as something sweet in his mouth, turned bitter in his belly for an instant. "I didn't look to get Perry Kline elected for such as this—" He finished it grimly, "But I can use him." He started for the door.

Jim had been staring at him. "But Anse," he began.

His father stopped, and faced him. "Anse Hatfield got a wild hog once," he reminded his son, "through his lackeys this side the line, his constables and his justices. But this time he's dickerin' for more than a wild hog. He's dealin' with the lives of my sons—and with the state of Kentucky!" His voice rose, from the force of his gathering energy. "This fracas happened in Kentucky, and if it turns out to have been a killin', it'll have to be accounted for in Kentucky. And this time I'm askin' for, and I expect, and I

intend to get—justice!” Then sharply, “Take that word back to the schoolhouse.”

Less than ever in his steely authority was Old Randall a man to be crossed. But at his order that Jim get back to the schoolhouse, his son answered moodily.

“Couldn’t no one McCoy get within a thousand god-damned miles of that Hatfield outfit right now.”

Old Randall swept him with a gaze of blighting competence. “*I’ll* get there—with the law. And I’ll strike the Hatfields to hell with it!”

During the swift maneuvering of his mind, already he had solved for himself the matter of the boys’ trial, and with cold determination was grasping it as the opportunity to grind his whole enemy under. His preparation for this power had been long and devious. Now his action was swift and urgent. The clank of his footsteps on the doorstone beat like blows from his forge hammer.

Roseanna was wild. She had been trying to think—and she thought of Jonse. She wanted to fly to him, to tell him what had happened. In her terror for her brothers and her heartsickness she could not think herself, but Jonse would know what to do. And then, that instinctive turning to him in everything, drew up, in front of a possibility she would not admit. Yet, their parting at the cabin, that look in his eye as she had left. People can take so much, and then something happens; they either break, or harden. Jonse was not the kind to break.

Jim, restless, glowering, went past her, toward the kitchen. She started to follow, and stopped, and made herself go on. He was getting the jug from the scuttle hole, and drank as though the sight of Roseanna threw double gloom into it.

"Jim, is—Jonse in this—" and then she did not want to know.

But he answered her explicitly, turning full on her. "Jonse rode in with Anse, and the last I saw of him was bein' his right-hand man."

Roseanna turned and went to her own room. Nothing was real. The floor under her steps was uncertain, and her feet wooden. Mute, numb she took off her ring and let it drop in the drawer of the chest. As she went back out, somewhere a door closed within her. She closed it carefully shut.

Jim had gone when Roseanna got back to the front of the house, and Sarie was saying, to no one in particular,

"The three of 'em are together"—her breath caught, should the sweep of fate take them all. Then resolutely, as though that were not the way she intended her thinking to go, "They're good brothers. They'll watch out for each other till—Randall gets back."

"If they could only know he's gone for help," Bess said.

Talking not so much to each other, as coming slowly out of shock.

"If the McCoy men can't get to that schoolhouse," said Sarie, "maybe *we* could."

Bess picked it up. A light came to her eyes. "Sure," she said softly. "Even the Hatfields would let womenfolks in to see their men."

They grew alerted by the idea, steadied by something at hand to do. They made quickly, deftly ready. Sarie got healing salve from the cupboard for Tolbert's cuts, found a piece of soft old linen for bandages. And Roseanna remembered Little Randall had not had his supper.

Once Bess went over to the baby, in bed up to his ears now, asleep.

"Phamer'd like so good to see it—" but her voice said she wanted both her loved ones close about her this night; she wanted to know for herself no harm came.

Knowing, but shaking her head, Sarie reminded, "It's pourin' the rain. This is no night for a child thing. Best leave him with Allifair."

Except for that, when they talked it was of factual things, for the immediate comfort of the prisoners. No one spoke of anything beyond that.

A black wind was screaming as they started out, knocking rain across with it. The shawl blew back from Roseanna's head, and as she gathered it close again, the rain struck her hand with a cold that went all through her veins. In the house Bess and her mother had managed to build up a hopefulness. Roseanna had tried to believe in it with them. But outside the reach of house lights, she could feel the terror—that in a thousand several ways had stalked her own joy these last three days, sometimes washed out and flooded over in happiness, only to emerge again the sharper—creeping over the other two as well. It closed in, on the driving rain, the sightless night, the mud.

They sank to their shoe tops in mud. Each step made a separate sucking noise as they pulled up for the next. Otherwise it grew a silent journey, made longer by fear, and the strangeness of it. This road was as familiar to Roseanna as anything in her life, but it seemed one she had never gone before. She had a sense of digging with her fingernails through a black rock cave toward reality.

Ahead of her Bess had a white kerchief on her head. Sometimes Roseanna flundered near enough to see it;

sometimes it was lost. Long before the road sagged away loosely, letting her know by the mucky hollow underfoot it was the cutoff to Sam McCoy's, their shawls were drenched, and their skirts clung in sogs. When finally they struggled on firmer ground for a space, and she knew they had come to the turn by the spring, it seemed they must have gone some roundabout way and come back to this—although there was only one road.

They groped on, stumbling over the roots of the big old hemlock. At some time she did not know, the wind had stopped, and the rain was letting up. By the time they came to the town, there was not even that drizzle. It was as though the night, about to reach its greatest pitch, were resting.

No lights showed from the scattered houses. Doors must be bolted and windows shuttered after what had happened and what was to come. They went by the place of the store with averted eyes.

Before they could make out the angry blackness of the river on the other side, they could hear its roar and thunder as it broke over the rocks. The sluggish Tug had risen rapidly in the hard rain. They climbed the rickety half-broken steps to the high swinging bridge across it, going over it one at a time, for it was a slight, creaking thing.

On the West Virginia side of the river, with the water rushing behind them, like something at their backs, they pushed on faster. They had been plodding singly, but now they drew together, as people do in danger. Sarie tried to say something reassuring, but she herself was trembling and shivering. Roseanna said nothing. Any cheering on for courage to endure what she had brought about, would have been mockery.

The schoolhouse was just a ways ahead now, still out of sight over the next rise, but the smell of burning pitch trailed down to them, ironically sweet. And suddenly, as they started the ascent in silent tautness, an appalling bellying started up. They still could see nothing, but the night was sent terrible by the drunken shouting of a funeral hymn, with a note of revelry in it.

*"Oh ye young, ye gay, ye proud,
You must die and wear the shroud—"*

"Oh my God," it was a breath more than a whisper, from Bess. A long shudder tore her.

Sarie stood stalk still. A treacherous yellow hue now hung in the darkness ahead, up from the rim of the road. It hung like a pall.

"Oh my God," whispered Bess again, as though afraid of speaking it aloud.

Frenzied then, they ran, and were halted by men who stepped from the brush on either side of them. A sharp exclamation burst from the one who confronted Sarie.

"What the hell! Women!"

A torch was lifted to the level of their faces, going from one to the other. In its pale light, eyes like pools of red-strained water—the eyes of the colorless haired Mounts, who had been with Ellison that day at the rally, and who had made Roseanna's flesh creep with aversion just at sight of him—were squinting at them malignantly.

"I'm Sarie McCoy," her mother said, her voice scarcely audible. "We've come to see my boys." From the very agony of her inward struggle she leaned forward, almost against the gun held by an old man with a beard like dirty

icicles. The man beside Bess searched the tortured face of the younger woman suspiciously.

"They're up to some pulin' trick, Uncle Jim."

"Search 'em," said the other briefly.

Mounts' heavy mouth was hanging loose, the thick lips rolled back. He put out a tongue and wet them as he reached a paw toward Roseanna. She cut him across the nose with her fist. He fell back, sputtering a string of vile curses.

The old man was untying Sarie's bundle.

"It's some salve," she said, "and pone and apple butter for the youngun'."

He frowned and lowered his eyes. He was embarrassed and said harshly, "Come on," and led the way.

The old schoolhouse was being guarded as though the prisoners within numbered a hundred, instead of three. Men of Hatfield law, the constable and his newly appointed deputies, were lined up across the front of it officially. One slouching young man, his long hair careless under his hat, stood under the oak tree. He leaned at his ease, but his pistol was in his hand. A second, backed up under the sagging shingle roof, had his rifle over his shoulder. Half hidden beside him a companion held his laconically by its middle. At the far corner of the building stood another, his head down, the slant of his hat brim bent to the same line as the gun over his shoulder. All of them were caught just enough to see, by the light of the two torches stuck at crazy angles in the cracks of the open doorway.

In full light the singers sat on the doorsteps, and on the floor just behind. Their guns lay across their laps, their jugs of moonshine handy. They were playing cards to pass the time, from a dirty deck of them, slapping them down in

time to the roisterous emphasis of the doleful dirge they were roaring.

The guards had stepped forward in surprise, and doubt, at the unexpected visitors, but the old man nodded them roughly back. "It's the McCoy women." Then furiously, above the orgy on the doorstep, "Didn't you hear me, you damn fools! I said the McCoy women were here. Shut up!"

The singers broke off, and looked abashed, and sullen in the presence of the white faced, mud draggled women. One leered, to Roseanna.

"Your doney man ain't here, honey. He's with Anse and his uncle your brothers tried to kill."

The card players moved aside, just, to let the women enter. Inside the door, they all stopped involuntarily short. At the far end of the room, the boys half sat, half lay on the floor, just as they had been thrown. Their arms were bound to their sides; their ankles at their boot middles were wrapped tightly together by the logging ropes used to lead them here. Little Randall, who did not need so thick a rope, was bound too.

Sarie compressed her lips, against a cry. And then her mother's eyes swept them all, and they all grew little to her in her grief for them, in their trouble and their helplessness. But her anxiety quickened again on Tolbert, her natural born roisterer, whose first recognition of her presence was that brightening in the look of the sick at the unexpected entrance of a loved one into the room.

The cords of Bess's throat were working convulsively against the rising of suffering, even as she smiled with strange brightness at Phamer. Phamer met the look with wonder in his gladness.

Roseanna stood looking at the one who always had been

nearest to her. And on Little Randall's scared face was joy at his sister's coming to him.

It was a barely perceptible exchange of an instant, and then the women were making their way down the short aisles lined with crude desks and split log seats.

"I might have knowed you'd come," Phamer was saying to Bess, that wonder still in it. "Half of what I've got in you is more than any one man has any right to expect."

"Phamer, Phamer—" Bess's voice was broken, that he should say those things now. "Don't—"

He looked at her steadily, smiling a little, and her hand tightened in the grip of his, on the floor between them, as she knelt by him.

"What are you doin' here?" Tolbert demanded it of his mother weakly, with an attempt to frown now; an effort that caused a twinge. His brows and face, like the whole upper part of his body through the rips of his shirt, were caked with drying blood, mixed with the dull red clay of the store yard. His hair was clotted with it.

"What do you think I'm doin'?" returned his mother. "Good thing this shawl's wet." Sarie began wiping at the gashes on his face. The cost of her calm could only be guessed by the unspeakable tenderness she put into it.

Tolbert let her minister as she would for a moment, and then asked, in guarded, impatient tone, "Where's pa?"

Sarie ripped a piece of linen into a long strip, and below the sound, said, "Gone for the law."

"The law?" echoed Tolbert. "Hell of a time for that. Why doesn't he get the boys and come for us?"

"Sh—" said Sarie. "You rest now, son."

But the fighting Tolbert could not rest.

Roseanna was crouched beside Little Randall, not able to

speak for the sight of him, so white and helpless. But she felt very close to her little brother in that moment.

"Oh you fool," she mourned then fiercely, "you little fool— You fought for something you believed in, and so did I. We're both fools."

At her unlooked for harshness with him, Little Randall got such a startledness in his eyes, that changed to sorrow, sadness that she had turned against him when he had needed her so. And suddenly she gathered him to her greedily, covering him with frantic caresses. The child's hand reached out as it could, in awkward, careful patting, consoling her—that protectiveness hidden warm in him, that came to show at unexpected times—

"I've been thinkin' tonight," Phamer was saying to Bess. "That north field I was aimin' to turn for rye in September, that'd just be a trouble to you. And it's a part of the tract that coal company agent wanted to buy. The name's in the right-hand pigeonhole of the desk. They offered me a good price for it. It would give you somethin' to do with."

At his factual thinking of what he had to leave her, and his plans for the best use of it to her—if that should be the way of it—Bess had to turn away her head.

Their low toned voices, whatever they were saying, all suddenly hushed. A deep growl was heard outside. The wrath of Anse was upon them. The card players came to their feet as the clan leader mounted the steps.

The gaunt Hatfield, his portentous presence throwing silence, his men falling back to make way for him, towered in the doorway. In the red flickering torchlight he looked some evil genius. His dilapidated hat was smashed low on his craggy head. His grizzled beard dripped into the black shadows of his coat. He stood with his long rifle gripped in

a bony hand from which he had not bothered to wash his brother's blood. The big brass ring from the pistol slung across his chest, caught in the light and burned like fire. His eyes, under their sunken lids, were black fiends.

Little Randall shook with terror at this apparition, and its meaning. Phamer moistened his parched lips, and Tolbert clenched and unclenched his hands bound at his sides. Anse swept his gaze over the three McCoy boys, one by one, as he made his pronouncement.

"Ellison's dead." He turned his eyes on the women. "Get out."

The cry Sarie had been suppressing broke with the anguished breaking of her spirit, and she fell to her knees before him, in supplication.

"Anse, for the love of Christ—"

"Ma!" It was a burst of abhorrence, from both Tolbert and Phamer, at sight of their mother groveling before the Hatfield leader. They writhed, struggling to get up, to haul her to her senses, to her pride, to kill the man who stood untouched, unmoved.

Roseanna had risen unconsciously at Anse's entrance, as though to meet her enemy on her feet. At seeing that callousness she knew too well turned so cruelly on her mother, she marched straight to him, and wished she could have done more.

"Devil Anse Hatfield," she struck on the title he had earned, with all her contempt. "A man well named."

There came a grim exultation to her older brother's eyes, but Anse merely turned to one of the men in the doorway. "Get 'em out."

Sarie came slowly to her feet, her face a gray featureless

thing, her hair fallen awry. A grimy hand of an escort was laid on her arm. Roseanna thrust it away.

"We're not bein' sent—we're *goin'*!"

The escort eyed the defiant flaming eyed girl leading the way out, uneasily. "Better not let them women get to Old Randall, Anse."

"I said get 'em out!" snarled Anse. He strode out himself, ahead of them.

The three women hesitated then, lingering, desperate, helpless, turning for a last yearning look toward the boys. Tolbert's weakness, during the last few moments, seemed to have been made strong. He half raised himself up, out of the very power of his hatred, to stare unwavering at the departing back of the Hatfield. Phamer's and Bess's eyes held, holding their hearts' life in the look. Then Bess turned with Sarie and went along weeping with her. But at the door, Roseanna rushed back, to smooth a tumble of hair that had fallen across Little Randall's smudgy forehead. She bent and kissed him lightly.

"That's for my big brother," she said.

Little Randall's eyes, very wide and black in his terrified face, got a queer look in them, and for an instant he seemed puzzled where to put them. Then he lifted them back to hers, with a shy, wild proudness in them.

Roseanna had to turn quickly.

Outside Anse was standing under the oak tree, his henchmen around him.

"I wouldn't be too rough on them boys, Anse," one of them was saying, troubled.

"Are you friend to Hatfield?" Anse's words cut level, and the other stood silenced.

But the constable spoke up. "I still say, Anse, they ought to be took back to Kentucky, where the fight was."

"They'll be took back to Kentucky—" Anse assured him, "*my* way." Leaving a question and threat, to travel with the women as they started back the way they had come.

A moon was breaking through the clouds. They could see a little where to pick their way. But they could not fix their minds on the road. They kept lifting their heads, to listen feverishly, for the sound of Old Randall coming. That was all that was left to them. When they had gone back over the Tug, and past the store and come to the forks of the road, they stood with their eyes strained down the way that led from Pikeville. It was a valley road, with a long view. It lay with a wet dullness in the moonlight—and nothing more. Sarie gave a long, suffocating sigh, and turned up the hill road home.

They bent their bodies into its slope. Sarie and Bess climbed the road as though it were the road to Calvary. To Roseanna, who had borne this upon them, the brown mud road stretched out like intolerable torment. And shortly at the church hill, she broke away, deaf to the cries after her. She plunged up the path, and into the woods behind the church, on to the bluff that dropped quickly to the river. She ran without thinking, only knowing that somehow she must make some final effort to stop Anse in whatever diabolical intention he had. She ran unfeeling of the lash of dripping branches, the cut of thorns, her breath coming in hard gasps.

The underbrush and trees thinned, to the wide rock floor of the bluff. She ran to the edge of it, hearing now the dull roar that lifted from the river below. The moon had come through the clouds, a fast moon, traveling the vast spaces

of inscrutable night sky now, lighting up the black waters with its silver spray. And in the light of it she could see the forms of men on the bank. She stared intently. Who were they? The Hatfields, or had her father got back? And were her brothers with them? She leaned forward, trying to make out their figures in that milling of men. She found Little Randall, because of his size. A sudden hysterical laugh of relief escaped her, as she realized it was on the Kentucky side of the river where they were. She laughed as though all danger were past, now they were back on their own side the line.

The laughter snuffed out. For a second she stood dumb at what was taking place. Through a part in the shifting of men, she saw Tolbert backed up against a tree, being tied there.

The intent burst in upon her with all the tumult of hell, and she leaped headlong, crashing into a laurel thicket on a rocky prominence below. She tried wildly to break her way on down through it, but the strong wet tangled stalks blocked her way at every advance. She was only losing time. Half out of her senses, she clawed her way back up the bluff, running along the edge of it to find an opening she could get down, taking a broken, rocky way. And half sliding, half falling, she was getting closer. Tolbert's voice carried to her faintly. She strained toward it intently. It came in inextinguishable scorn.

"I'll look the man in the face who shoots me."

Her scream was shattered by a roar of hate; the flash of fire. Even before the echo of those shots died out, another equal reverberation of vengeance shook the very rocks down which she was stumbling. The second shots, the second brother. She tripped blindly over a root, and fell with

a force that mercifully stunned her for a moment. And came back to a sense of pause. She struggled to her feet in unutterable horror. She was quite near. Through the clearing before her now she could see the slump of Tolbert's body, like the slump of a giant to whom it had not even been given the honor to fall. She stood immobilized, only turning her staring eyes in slow fascination to Phamer. Her second brother, through the ropes that held him, had sagged half forward. They hung so, dead.

Roseanna stood frozen.

Their murderers, in one shadowed group directly below her, were hesitating.

"I've had enough—" the old man with the dirty beard spoke gruffly. "If the kid'll do some beggin', let him off."

Little Randall, like Roseanna, was staring at his brothers. He seemed to be kept standing by the ropes that held him when his trembling legs could not have. Roseanna wanted to call out to him, but any expression of anything seemed gone from her—even of anguish; she lacked the ability to suffer any more. But at the suggestion that he beg, the child stiffened. He disdained the offer with a lift of his head.

"Shoot and be damned!" The voice was high and cracked.

The old man groaned a curse. There was an argument—

"No one carries *this* story—"

The third shots rang out.

The earth reeled and blackened, and went vacant.

It was evening, two days later, Roseanna was standing by the window in her room. She heard Little Randall's pup come tearing. It hurtled itself against the closed door, from the other side, giving that short impatient bark for its master to pay attention. Roseanna turned vacantly, and went to

the door, and opened it. The puppy, wagging in excitement, bounded in, barking shrilly and skidded on a rag rug in the middle of the floor, sending it to a wad against the wall. He sniffed all around, eagerly, and then, not finding his playmate, sat down in front of Roseanna, his back leg thrown out in that nonchalance which had so tickled Little Randall.

When she made no move or sound, presently it wandered away. But at sight of its master's bed in the next room, it went racing again, and made it in one happy leap; as though expecting to have the boy duck his head in under the covers from its wet cold nuzzling, and come out again and laugh, and pull his dog close against him. The puppy had been making these rounds ever since the night of the fight. Little Randall had been so proud of how quick his dog was to learn. But this was something it could not seem to understand. He lay down, stretching himself out flat, his head between his paws, but with eyes alert; the whole lithe little body ready to spring up joyously at sound of familiar bare footsteps in the empty room. As he lay so, he turned his eyes on the girl standing so still in the open door.

The gray door to the room she had taken such pleasure in. She stood as though gray door after gray door were opening, into one empty room after another. The full sad mouth, once red, turned down now with the knowledge of emptiness. The wide gray eyes with the darkness under them, darkness under them and darkness in them as she stood at the open door. The sad, lived eyes looking to all that had been wrong that lay behind. She looked into the room that had been her brothers'. They had been young and strong, and now they were dead.

And then slowly, as she stood staring, the vacancy began

to be peopled in her mind; pieces of voices came, parts of faces.

. . . She saw her father's face as it had bent in that last long, intent look on the still countenances of his sons, at the churchyard. It had been so riveted a gaze it had been hard to tell the living from the dead.

. . . A picture of her mother came. Sarie, her gray hair combed neatly again, was getting supper after the funeral, pouring buttermilk into a wide flat bowl full of flour. She was pouring it as she always had, by some measurement of her own, going on, making the biscuits to go with the ham already baked, and the cakes and pies brought in by neighbors.

Her mother's smile came back to her, a smile of the eyes made bright by tears that would be there a little always. "You wouldn't think a body would be interested in things like food at a time like this," she had said, as she worked. "But it's all been brought so kindly. Like Mrs. Winters. It must have hurried her to think straight enough at one time to get that whole meal together and bring it to us, like she did yesterday, when none of us could think. And that woman comin' clear from the head of the hollow to bring us her night bloomin' cereus, when that flower must have meant a good deal to her."

Everyone had put aside every other consideration when trouble had struck. But the people who had come to give comfort, had stayed to give homage, marveling among themselves at the discovery of thoughtfulness for others in those who were in sorrow. Sarie would accept their awkward offering of sympathy in sober gratitude, and turn it back to some concern of their own. Roseanna herself had

gone to the kitchen to help, and she had been the one who had been helped; or who should have been.

"What's a hero, Roseanna?" Little Randall's own voice had come back to her, from a long time ago when he was just little. "Somebody who dies fightin'?" he had wondered. And she had said, looking at him oddly, "That's as good a way to put it as any, Little Randall." And then thoughtfully, in that way he could sometimes, saying such awful truth out of such ignorance, "There's lots of heroes in the world, aren't there?"

Somebody had called her mother just then, from the front of the house, and Sarie had wiped her floury hands and laid one of them compassionately over Roseanna's.

"If you could only cry, Roseanna."

... "It's a pretty evenin'." The light on Bess's thin face came to her, from just a while ago, when Bess had come in from a walk up the brush pasture hill. Bess had the same brightness of tears to her eyes as Sarie. But she had said, of the evening,

"There's a kind of peace about it. It's good, Roseanna, to feel right with God again. I haven't since—that night." For Bess there had been only one night; the night Phamer went away. But now she had looked down at the baby in her arms, and said, as to herself, "I'd look at it and think, oh why you have to favor him so much, I don't know! It drove me mad. And yet, I wanted it to—I wanted to look at it, and think of him."

The baby had switched around in her arms just then, and laughed, that devastating laugh, completely wild, that he seemed to do with his nose. Every time it had happened before, they all had laughed. And at his doing it now, Bess had smiled.

"You can't stay—just bitter, Roseanna; not and look up at a blue sky and hear a baby laugh." It was a conclusion she had reached, but she said it almost with an appeal in it, to the younger girl, for assurance of it.

Roseanna had listened dully. She did not know. She used to have philosophies, too; when a fullness of the sky could bring a filling in again within. But that had no place in her now. She had nothing that applied.

If it was plain tragedy that hit, people towered up through it to more than they were. They could face it with a bravery neither they nor anyone else knew they had, as Bess and her mother were doing. But if you were the one who had caused the trouble?

She had not afflicted willingly. She was not excusing herself, nor even questioning. She was just searching for the reason as she stood in the doorway.

. . . A remark of Uncle Dyke's came, as he had walked back and forth across the floor, his hands clasped behind him, his head bowed in pondering. The remark had startled her at first, coming from him.

"I didn't bother to pray about this," he had said slowly. "Times when things have looked black for folks, I'd feel a kind of singin' inside me, like an old hymn liftin', and know their fears wouldn't be trouble after all. But this time that didn't come to me. Seems like this was just somethin' that was meant to be. The Lord moves in mysterious ways, Roseanna."

A thought had appeared to her at that. All living might be a joke somebody played, over and over. The thought wasted for its own lack. But nothing came to take its place.

. . . The voice of her cousin Zinny broke in. Zinny had beaten a prompt track to the house of mourning and estab-

lished herself in it. Her wasted yellow jowls had hung in unwonted exhilaration, and in the caved out hollows for them the eyes by turns had been struck with pious tragedy, and had snapped with malice. In her stupor Roseanna had only looked at her and wondered why she should be left and the boys taken. Zinny would not die for a long time yet, although she already was dead to everything except her own vindictive thinking.

"Half their boys dead, and a girl worse than dead," she had canted in undertone. But Roseanna had heard, and agreed. She wondered herself, why she could not have been taken, instead of them.

. . . The presence of Thad rose before Roseanna, as he had walked out to the side of the house where she had been chopping firewood. He had taken the ax from her hands. Thad had been the first one she could talk to.

"It's all my fault, Thad."

He had answered her sharply. "Now stop it! The thing's done, and what's the sense broodin' on it?" His impatience with her had almost brought her out of it. "If this had happened the other way around, would you have wanted the boys to keep goin' over it, and goin' over it?"

"No." He had almost steadied her.

"Well, then!" In his definiteness a log had flown up under his blow and barked his knuckles.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Let me get somethin' to put on it for you." It nearly had been the companionship of old times.

At his getting to her, almost reaching her, he had put down the ax, and come to her.

"Nothin' ever hurts me," he had scouted, of her offer, "except seein' you be so—sad. And then I can feel the

sands slippin' out from under me. Let me help you, Roseanna." He had said it without demand.

She always had felt grateful for Thad's devotion, but never quite had been able to believe it, or understand, until now. Strange the way understanding comes, the way you suddenly see how it is with everyone in the world who loves, in the tears that spring to your own eyes. But her heart had shrunk back out of the way, from her own thinking, as well as from him, numbly; and she had shaken her head.

. . . "Roseanna," her mother's voice came in again, this time as though the weight which had seemed to lighten for a while, only had lifted to fall again. "I'm afeared. I don't like the look of things. I don't want more trouble—seems like I've had enough. And more killin' and hatin' and fightin' won't bring me my boys back. But I'm afeared Randall's got it in head to do somethin' desperate. He's been out in that forge ever since we come from the churchyard. Go see can you get him to come in."

It had been in Roseanna's mind to say that she of all people should not be the one to try to see her father right now. But her mother had looked tired with trying.

The fire in the forge had gone out. Her father had just been sitting there, staring at the anvil on which he had hammered and planned so much. But his expression was unchanged from the one which he had bent upon his sons. His head had come up slowly, to see who it was intruding. He had given her a look to cut her to the heart, had not all feeling reached one level, where it stayed, like a rut in her.

. . . Catches of conversation, from men still lingering in groups about the yard and house, carried back to her; men who eyed the lurking hollows and the road warily.

"They've hurried the buryin'—that's a good thing—it's no time for regrets, but a little action—" The outrage against the three McCoy boys had been an outrage to everyone of the name. The blood of their kin buried under the ground called out. They waited restlessly for their leader to speak. . . .

"Roseanna," it was Allifair. She came to the door and spoke timidly to her sister who stood staring. Roseanna looked down at the child in her nightgown, absently.

"I've tried and tried to go to sleep," said the little girl. "But I can't." Allifair's eyes were wide and deep—deep enough to hold a breadth of living. "I keep thinkin', Roseanna—and it makes me feel so bad right here." She put a small hand to her stomach, woefully. "Come tell me a story," she pleaded. Then anxiously, "But it won't be the kind of story that makes you cry in the night, will it?"

Roseanna put her hand on the little girl's fair hair, and looked down at her sadly, helplessly.

"I'm afraid that's the only kind of story I'd know to tell."

Allifair looked at her a long, solemn time, and then, shyly, tiptoed over to the chest and carefully lifted the lamp for her sister, against the dark, and sidled out.

"Come on," she said softly, to the pup. He wagged his tail, hesitated, and then got up, and trotted out after her.

Roseanna had come alone to cry. Even the one who has caused the tears of others has a right to cry once. But she had not. The attempt had ended in low lidded staring across a room. She turned and went to the chest, to turn out the light, to go back to the others—bound to them now even more than before by their sorrow without condemnation.

She reached her hand toward the lamp, and instead opened the drawer, and drew out her ring. At the touch

of it, her breath drew up involuntarily sharply, in an inaudible catch of it. The beauty of it, the fineness—her eyes went over its details tenderly, remembering the way he had looked at this and that of their times together; his eyes, his face came back. It seemed his face she was studying, the lines of it, the shape of the bone, her eyes loving—

But quickly, all of it. In little more than a moment she was shoving the ring away from her, backing away from it rapidly, sitting down on the edge of the bed, her hands clasped tightly between her knees.

Why should the thought of Jonse have to come now, when already she had more than she could bear? She must be going crazy!

She dropped back on the bed, to gather physical strength as well, for all she had to fight. But she could not sleep. Yet, at some time she did not know, she must have slept, for as in a dream she heard Jonse's voice, calling to her. It was so real she sat up, stark.

“Roseanna—” the voice was low, guarded.

It was no illusion. Jonse was there. At the reality she sprang to the window.

“Jonse! You shouldn't have come here—” Oh, he was mad to have done this; to have come into the very midst of the enemy, risking his life in the most foolhardy way ever a man could!

“Where else would I be?” he asked her. “Are you all right?”

His presence, his tone, was like something strong, that she could lean on, and feel held up. She needed Jonse. She needed him!

But she sent a swift glance toward the open door, where

the sound of their voices might carry to the others in the house, and went quickly to shut it. She thought of the brush pasture hill where Bess had been. No one would be going there this time of night.

"The hill back of the house," she whispered. As she passed the dresser she picked up her ring. She felt an exultant heightening of her heart as she put it on again—until she remembered, blankly. But she slipped over the sill, and silently, urgently led him away from the house, looking back constantly; keeping to shadows, skirting the forge, and going around the barn to the far side of the slight hill. There, out of immediate sight of the house, she waited, and Jonse fell in with her. They walked up the hill silently, in the jagged shadow of a rail fence, turning to each other occasionally, just a meeting of the eyes with such tragedy between them there was not much of themselves in it now. When they came to where the fence joined a maple tree, they stopped, still silent. The wind in the maple tree overhead sounded like rain, but it was a clear night. It sounded sharp like fall, but it was only August. The wind in the maple tree sounded like moonlight—

Roseanna turned to Jonse, groping again; baffled. "What's the reason for it all, Jonse?"

He made no answer, in lack of answer; just stood staring at deep nothing. They stood together in it, in blankness deeper than sorrow, than hurt, deeper than thought or heart.

Jonse stood so deeply in it, Roseanna began to forget her own, in his. She wanted to put her arms about him, comfortingly. She would have, in normal time of trouble. But this was not normal. Now it was not seemly. They stood each one alone, and yet needing to know the other was there to be blank with.

How could it be it was by his side she still belonged? It had been so down in her room, when everything else had faded into the background and it was his figure that had emerged, his face she had seen when she looked at the ring. Then it had come before thought. Now it came in full consciousness.

He had not said he had taken no part in her brothers' death. She did not now believe he had. But even if it were so, she knew, with a knowledge that went even beyond despair, it was just there—that she loved him.

Loving somebody was like faith in God; they might seem to fail you time and time again, but you went right on believing. And as they had been coming to do, before the trouble had separated them, what one was thinking the other often put into words—Jonse turned to her, and said,

“I’m sorry about what happened at the river. This doesn’t help it any. But I wanted you to know I had no direct hand in that.”

Roseanna closed her eyes a second. When she opened them she told him, “And I didn’t mean what I said that morning at the cabin.”

They had looked at each only quickly, soberly before. They had seemed to pass out of themselves, only seeking to lend each other some comfort. Now they were brought near, with something of surprise at the goodness of the warmth of their eyes’ holding. They looked at each other in a new way, deeper, sweeter; in the depth of circumstances it went through and beyond abandon, to assurance of the other, knowing at least there was that much in a world of unfathomable pattern.

A twig cracked under a step. With an oath Jonse flashed his hand to his belt. Roseanna spun around. Her father was

looming up over the brow of the hill. In the moonlight his face was as bloodless as his voice.

"One shot from that revolver, and it'll be your last."

As Old Randall spoke, Jonse's arms were seized from behind and wrenched backward, with an unexpected force that knocked the revolver from his hand.

At the spoilers coming suddenly upon them again, turning aside their ways even in this, pulling them to pieces, turning aside their rights as people—and setting Jonse as their mark, Roseanna's whole heart screamed out.

"No!"

Her father gave her the straight stare of a madman. "Tie him good, boys," he ordered, "like they done our boys."

With all her force Roseanna sprang on him. But his strength as well was an insane one. He came straight on, his gun leveled.

"You don't know what you're doin'!" She had turned with that same plea on Anse once. She had made it then in anger. Now she was desperate. Her father remained as out of reach of every attempt to move his sense of reason, of justice, or compassion as Anse had been.

Powerful emotions were contending on the old man's face as he held his gun on the man who, in his vengeance and his imaginings, made sport of his daughter and had killed his sons. His whole frame shook, not from weakness, but as strong gut stretched to its limit vibrates—a thrilling.

Jonse had gone hard and cold. His eyes looking into the inflamed ones of the McCoy leader, were a wall, hiding everything.

"Can't that thing shoot?" he asked, of the McCoy's wavering.

With that, Old Randall's momentary combat with him—

self was over. The tempting weapon in his hand firmed, but only as he himself did. There was no release, no withdrawal of his hatred. But there was that of having beaten it into his purpose. He lowered his gun, with something directed, deliberative in the gesture.

"You'll not be shot. You'll swing."

There was an instant of astonishment from the McCoy's, who had come to ring the knoll. Then the satisfaction in the glitter of their eyes, the excitement of battle, brightened, at this surprise act of their leader.

"I God," the voice of Sam McCoy spoke up, in jubilant admiration. "Randall's goin' the Hatfields one better!"

"Got a tree right handy," Paris entered zestfully into the malignant enjoyment. "Just stand him on the fence there, Randall, string him up, and kick out the top rail."

The McCoy leader spoke again, driving the will he had inflicted upon himself, upon his followers. His metallic voice rasped harsh with the gall to the triumph of his long laid plans.

"I said I'd see anyone hung who touched my boys. And I will. But they'll hang by law. Jonse Hatfield, we're takin' you to Pikeville, to be tried for murder."

He was taking Jonse to Pikeville, to be tried by the man he had put in office. Roseanna turned from her father to Jonse. His eyes meeting hers, in a continuing of the look that had been broken into, and wholly ironical now, had the screwing power of bringing back the sweetness of all the times when they had been let alone.

Her bitterness gave her might. She turned and ran. She ran down the hill they had walked up side by side. Without taking time to light the lantern just inside the barn, she yanked a bridle into the mouth of the first startled horse

she came to, and sprang to its back. The horse reared under its unexpected rider, but at the hard bit bolted, and plunged out of the yard and down the road. It was Tolbert's horse she had taken, on which she had ridden with him to the rally, with Little Randall dallying contentedly along. Now she was riding to get the only help she knew, for Jonse.

She clipped her thighs close to the horse, giving him free rein and calling his name, urging him on. It was a good horse under her. She felt the great muscles contracting and expanding, and the shock of its hoofs as they struck, each one bringing her nearer the dividing river.

At the dark river that had known works of darkness, Roseanna caught her heels full in his ribs, and plunged him into it. Once, past the schoolhouse, high on the ridge, she bent under an overhanging bough, and remembered the way she had ridden with Jonse on that first surging night—She had only travail now in remembrance. She thought of Jonse, started captive to Pikeville—if her father's power still held over those men who had stolen up with ready weapons. And even though her father's orders had been too authoritatively sharp and precise for there to be much possibility of their being ignored by those immediately present, the party too well could be ambushed by other McCoys. The idea of Jonse dying without even having seen his slayer goaded her on. But the pace of the gallop, never halting, had whipped up the blood of her mount, and the excited animal raced of itself.

When the road dropped from its high narrow precipices into the woods whose leisurely quiet had risen up around them that first night with an illusion of shelter—she saw how plainly they had been trifles in some great game they had striven vainly against, which no effort of theirs could

stay; pitting themselves against forces that had swamped them, and dragged others down with them. The hoofs cut through the soft trail, or jarred unexpected into washes of the water stream alongside. Once the horse stumbled, and recovered; branches from the growth revived by rain caught in the gear, but the horse's unslackened speed tore them off.

The trail widened out, into the broad valley of Hatfield country. There was the same slaty suggestion of mountains in the moonlight. And against the clear sky and bright stars was the strength of Jonse's peak. Roseanna glanced up as a traveler who has been a long time away and coming back says involuntarily, knowing it deeply, "I'm home—" The brief feeling did not stay. She rode on, her soul far removed from peace—she had forgotten happiness.

Horses tethered to the house fence whickered nervously, and at the thudding approach of another across the bridge, Anse came to the door, rifle in hand, to greet whatever visitor of the night.

At actual sight of him Roseanna pulled up—in realization of just what an evil and bitter thing she was doing by this. She was betraying her own people. For the first time willfully, she was betraying her father. It was a flashing realization that blackened out. She threw the reins curded with sweat over the horse's heaving head, and ran up the steps.

"Anse, they've got Jonse!"

Anse eyed her sharply, suspiciously.

"It's true!"

The agitation on the girl's face was too plain to doubt.

"Who's got him, and where are they?"

Men were crowding in behind him, from the front room.

The Hatfields had been gathering about their leader, as the McCoys had been waiting for theirs. At sight of the rough lot of them, Roseanna again was pulled up by what she was doing. Knowing it would do little good, but having to try, she said,

"Neither Jonse or I want this trouble to go any further, Anse. But I can't talk to my father, any more than Jonse could talk to you. But I'll tell you where Jonse is, if you'll promise there won't be killin'."

Anse considered the trade—and made it.

"They're takin' Jonse to Pikeville, for trial. I rode hard, and they shouldn't be any more than just be started on the Pikeville road by now."

With a single motion Anse turned and strode through the gathered men.

"We're ridin' to Kentucky."

There was an answering scramble for firearms within doors. Roseanna leaned back against the wall. A big shadow pushed its way out to her. It was Levisa. She put a fierce hand on Roseanna's arm, as though to shake what she wanted to know out of the girl.

"Is Jonse all right?"

"He was the last I saw of him."

The hand dropped. Levisa looked at Roseanna then, as she had before, in wonder and in pity.

"You're a good girl, Roseanna McCoy."

The Hatfield men were coming out, Anse leading. Opposite Roseanna, Anse paused. For the third time he looked at her, and this time saw her for what she was: a McCoy who loved his son enough to have left her own people for him, even to this. He seemed confounded by it. He stood like a mighty man confuted by a weak and foolish thing.

His shaggy brows tilted slightly upward, throwing the grimness of his face to strange disorder. He looked at the girl before him as though had he that other day to do over, when she had come to his house, it all might have gone differently. Those searching eyes, tortured by what they sought, for an instant seemed to see straight through her, to her heart; and they grew deep with sorrow.

A faint smile touched Roseanna's lips, at this final irony.

"Let's get goin', Anse," one of his men broke in impatiently. "It don't sound reasonable them McCoys are carryin' Jonse to Pikeville. It's more a trap, to get him off in some lonesome spot."

The Hatfield leader's momentary wavering swept away.

"If Jonse ain't with 'em, kill 'em!"

The bearded clansman ran down the steps, the girl who had brought the message forgotten. Nor did she think of it herself. She stood while twenty some men, following heavily from their weight of arms, hurried to their horses. Cap, she noticed, had four pistols on his hips and the look of a killer come of age on his face.

She went down the steps to her own horse, and stood with her hand on its wet neck, until the last man thundered out of the yard. She mounted and fell in at the end of the fury that streaked across the mountains. She rode dry eyed, dry hearted; everything in her burned to an even hardness.

The Hatfields surrounded the completely surprised McCoys just a ways beyond the fork of the turn toward Pikeville. The McCoys, halting with raised rifles, lowered them warily as they swiftly calculated numbers by the crashing riders coming in from all sides. The Hatfields had broken, and were surrounding them—coming in from the river, and

down from the mountains on either side; a force numbering more than twice their own. Through them Roseanna saw Jonse, indifferent in the midst of his captors, but as surprised as they. She stopped motionless, and sank limply in the saddle.

Anse already was in the middle of the McCoy group. He glanced at his son swiftly, and yanked up, facing Old Randall.

"This is as far as you're takin' the boy, Randall." Anse's voice was murderously soft.

The McCoy leader sat with the resistance of one who had seen the just condemned and killed.

"Jonse is answerin' for murder—the first of your crew."

Anse's eyes glittered dangerously. "You're judgin' none of mine. If I remember, it was your side started this."

Old Randall's purpose only redoubled as it was threatened. "There'll be no more killin' that I can stop. But everyone who killed my boys I'll see hanged or behind the walls. I'll carry it to the governor if need be."

Anse sneered. "The Hatfields take care of themselves. And we'll take care of any trouble you try to make for us."

They both sat chiefs, in deadlock; one twisting the law to his purposes, the other a law unto himself.

Then Anse said, in dead boding quiet, "I'm lettin' you off this time, Randall. But I'm warnin' you—let me and mine alone! Take your men and ride."

Old Randall did not stir in his place. "I'll see every one of you hunted down."

There was an uncertain hesitation among the McCoy ranks. One man turned his horse. Others followed. But something in their silence, their restiveness as they left, boded ill.

As his men scattered, the face of Old Randall showed stark in the moonlight; not changed so much by these days as that their course had slashed and cleaned and molded it down to hard and terrible bone.

Not far from him Roseanna sat as motionless as he. Her presence gradually began to be peculiarly impressed upon him. He turned his head toward her slowly, to put off believing what he was knowing. His shoulders twitched, and his hands clenched as though he were afraid of using them.

Roseanna sat resistless, looking back at him dully. He looked at his daughter intently. They sat in the silence of people who have maintained loss.

At length he looked away from her, just past her, down the road from Pikeville, as though he were seeing the law he had built up for his own wild justice coming in ways he had not foreseen. His face had the look of seeing down a long hard way. His shoulders drooped and he looked a tired man. But he started his horse doggedly, and rode out through the wide circle of Hatfields who silently let him through.

Anse turned his own horse, and the circle gathered to follow.

Jonse dismounted and crossed to Roseanna. And again as they had so much, they stood alone at the edge of a crowd. Roseanna looked at him, with that in it of the turning to a blank page after having read through a great deal; the last page waiting to be written on.

"Jonse, no matter what we do, we only make it worse."

He shook his head. "All this would have happened anyway. We're only caught in it."

For a moment they were apart. How they came together

she did not know, only that they were holding each other silently, their faces hidden against each other's.

Two people who loved each other, who could have been happy together, who might have had children who would have been better and bigger than they. Or maybe the same thing, one way or another, would have happened to their children; for their children too it might have been cut off at the crest.

They drew away, and Jonse stood staring.

"Roseanna, I don't even try to think about it any more. I can fight anything in it except the way I feel about you."

"Keep safe, Jonse," she pleaded. "God keep you safe."

He looked at her helplessly, and took both her hands in his, as he had done once before, when the very perfection of that parting had portended the end. They stood in mutual recognition that the cycle was completed. The desperation of it was in their lack of words as they stood so, and in the tears of their eyes. They stood dumb with all the things unsaid, knowing them a thousandfold. And then, the despair of his tone saying the whole of it, Jonse said, "I love you."

He made a small gesture, that bespoke a great deal. He took off his hat, and drew from its band the pine sprig, and put it in her hand, for all their quiet times.

And was gone.

After a time Roseanna turned slowly into the road home. The road she had traveled so many times. She remembered the night, long ago, when they all had been growing up, when Tolbert and Phamer and Little Randall and Thad and she had gone swinging through the rain to the church

house, and had come home through mist; mysterious, exultant, on the edge of so much.

This was the way she had gone to the rally, when the sun and wind were high, and the world full of promise.

She went by the log where Jonse and she had sat, when happiness had come weightless as sunlight and as undemanding.

She came to the place of the ramshackle mill, where they had run laughing for shelter; shelter from more than they had known.

The wind soughed through the hemlock as she rode under it, the hemlock where they had first quarreled, and come back.

The road forged upward, and came to the spring by the rock. She dismounted, and let the horse drink, and when it was through it wandered aside to browse tiredly.

Roseanna stood by the rock a long time. In the moonlight the small quiet pool of water looked deep and black. She could remember the day when its untroubled surface had seemed something fed by constant springs, when it had looked deep and clear and sufficient.

And if later that day she had found the freedom she was seeking in being wholly woman for a man she loved, that had been unexpected, but so right she wondered why she had not expected it.

There was another road, just a brown dirt path; but for a while it had been the plainest thing in sight. The path leading up to Jonse's mountain and down again, to this that she had traveled with the calm of renunciation, until suddenly she had been broken with wanting. And afterward Little Randall had stabbed.

This was the road Bess and her mother and she had labored through when fear had taken them, and the stars were sealed and the mud was a holding torture, and hope had failed. And Tolbert and Phamer and Little Randall had been brought back on a mud sled over this road, dead, because of her.

And tonight, she who had been made for peace, had fled over it to bring war.

She had a little piece of pine, and a gold ring. That was all she had. She lifted her cupped hand slowly, as though she were lifting up life in her hand; that fire she had taken to her heart; their song, like all the great and soaring things that ever had happened in the world—and hadn't; the tearing, searing, destructive passion of both love and hate. She held their upstraining lightning-beautiful and terrible ways together, and if their holding time had been brief, that had its own compensation. It was not the gift of everyone to know love so completely. Most people loved only half knowing, pleasant, shallow; they were denied the glory of its torture. She held pride in her hand, that first instinctive pride she had felt in him as a man she would choose to stand beside, and which had grown to include all of love. She held their faith in each other that would have let them be the proud people of the earth in what they could have built up together. She held their quiet in her hand, that they had known so little of.

And slowly, like a healing that began to come of itself, came a quiet rightness at the thought of him, assembling itself out of all the little things half remarked or forgotten, but here now; things too wonderful for her to know except by years of their unfolding to knowledge quietly whole, in the image of him deep in her.

The sky and hills and moon were soft in the night that was dark except where the stars were, and they shone in clear quiet. She hoped they were being quiet stars for him, as he went his way.

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